

Jarno Hietalahti

The Dynamic Concept of Humor

Erich Fromm and the Possibility
of Humane Humor



Jarno Hietalahti

The Dynamic Concept of Humor

Erich Fromm and the Possibility of Humane Humor

Esitetään Jyväskylän yliopiston yhteiskuntatieteellisen tiedekunnan suostumuksella
julkisesti tarkastettavaksi yliopiston vanhassa juhlasalissa S212
toukokuun 13. päivänä 2016 kello 12.

Academic dissertation to be publicly discussed, by permission of
the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Jyväskylä,
in Auditorium S212, on May 13, 2016 at 12 o'clock noon.



UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

JYVÄSKYLÄ 2016

The Dynamic Concept of Humor

Erich Fromm and the Possibility of Humane Humor

JYVÄSKYLÄ STUDIES IN EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIAL RESEARCH 552

Jarno Hietalahti

The Dynamic Concept of Humor

Erich Fromm and the Possibility of Humane Humor



UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

JYVÄSKYLÄ 2016

Editors

Olli-Pekka Moisio

Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä

Pekka Olsbo, Sini Tuikka

Publishing Unit, University Library of Jyväskylä

URN:ISBN:978-951-39-6612-6

ISBN 978-951-39-6612-6 (PDF)

ISBN 978-951-39-6611-9 (nid.)

ISSN 0075-4625

Copyright © 2016, by University of Jyväskylä

Jyväskylä University Printing House, Jyväskylä 2016

ABSTRACT

Hietalahti, Jarno

The Dynamic Concept of Humor. Erich Fromm and the Possibility of Humane Humor.

Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 2016, 69 p. (+ original articles)

(Jyväskylä Studies in Education, Psychology and Social Research

ISSN 0075-4625; 552)

ISBN 978-951-39-6611-9 (nid.)

ISBN 978-951-39-6612-6 (PDF)

Diss.

This dissertation focuses on the social philosophy of humor from the viewpoint of Erich Fromm's critical humanistic thinking. The work consists of an introduction and four individual articles. The introduction discusses Fromm's theories in relation to the phenomenon of humor to provide a basis for the articles. The central aim is to understand the dynamic nature of humor and how it is related to the problem of being a paradoxical creature, that is, a human being. It is claimed that humor has to be analyzed and interpreted in a unique historical and cultural situation. The first article discusses Fromm's concept of social character to offer a theoretical tool to understand how deeply humor is a social phenomenon. It is argued that the social character is a crucial component if we are to reach beyond jokes and laughter, and to grasp their deeper social significance. The second article furthers this thought by developing a critical standpoint on the phenomenon of laughing at oneself. It calls into question the prevailing optimism about the capability to ridicule oneself. Following Fromm, it is claimed that humor needs a serious backbone from which the perceived oddities are evaluated. The third article brings forth the debate of humor and freedom. In opposition to the widely shared idea that humor should be absolutely free, it is argued that humor cannot be separated from the sphere of humanity, and this basic fact sets the ground for the freedom of humor. Freedom has to be obtained within the limits of humanity. This leads to the notion that it is untenable to claim that we should be always able to laugh at everything. The fourth article elaborates the influence of social circumstances for humor, and the competitive nature of contemporary humor is taken under critical scrutiny. It is argued that humor and laughter reflect the current historical situation and, eventually, ourselves. Therefore, from a humanistic perspective, it is concerning how natural and popular humor competitions appear to be. As a whole, the dissertation is a philosophical study, and it aims more at philosophical understanding than to concrete empirical research settings. However, the conducted research is empirically inspired philosophy, and thus intimately connected to the living phenomena of humor and laughter.

Keywords: Erich Fromm, humor, sense of humor, laughter, smile, social character, incongruity theory, paradox, humanism, social philosophy

Author's address Jarno Hietalahti
Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy
P.O. Box 35
FI-40014 University of Jyväskylä
jarno.hietalahti@jyu.fi

Supervisors Olli-Pekka Moisio
Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy
University of Jyväskylä

Jussi Kotkavirta
Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy
University of Jyväskylä

Reviewers Juhani Ihanus
Institute of Behavioural Sciences
University of Helsinki

Liisi Laineste
Department of Folkloristics
Estonian Literary Museum

Opponent Rauno Huttunen
Faculty of Education
University of Turku

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Conducting a study on the philosophy of humor is not as funny as it might sound. For a philosopher, humor is a serious business, and only rarely does an analysis of laughter trigger giggling. That said, a philosophical inquiry into humor encourages one to think, ponder, wonder, and contemplate. And, eventually, a philosopher of humor has to try to communicate his insights to others in an understandable way. My dissertation is such an attempt.

This attempt would have been practically impossible if I had not had the opportunity to discuss my themes with various marvelous people around me. Fortunately, the subject matter of the dissertation is something on which basically everyone is an expert; we all recognize the ludicrous incongruities in the world, and the amusement experienced cannot be taken away from us. At the moment of laughter, theories of humor cannot dictate how we should feel. The shared moments of joy have taught me a lot. For me, every encounter with so many humorous, and serious, people has offered a possibility to understand humor in an ever deeper manner. So, after all, there has been room for lively humor in this process, too. Sadly, I am unable to list every single encounter of my life in this section, so I have to settle with listing only a few very important people here.

First of all, I need to thank my supervisors Jussi Kotkavirta and, especially, Olli-Pekka Moisio. Your limitless faith in my work and endless encouragements have been a vital source of inspiration – not to even mention the knowledge you possess and share. Without you, I would never have written this dissertation. Without you, I would not think and laugh like I do.

Seppo Knuutila's altruistic guidance to the depths of humor research has been precious. Arto Laitinen has warm-heartedly and wisely helped me through many unclear paths of social pathologies. During my stay in Tübingen, Rainer Funk has been an irreplaceable guide in so many respects. Without the financial support from The Erich Fromm Institute Tübingen, this work would still be in a never-ending progression.

I am grateful for the referees of this study, Liisi Laineste and Juhani Ihanus. Their comments and suggestions gave the necessary final touches for this dissertation. Of course, as a stubborn philosopher, I did not follow their every comment. In hindsight, I have begun to question my pertinacious character.

Thanks to Alison Beale, the English parts of the dissertation are readable and my thought patterns easier to follow. Naturally, all weaknesses of the dissertation are my responsibility.

The wonderful community – including both staff and students – of the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy is a unit to envy. I consider myself lucky to have been able to study and work with you. Especially the circle of philosophers has been (in)sanely important during this process. Of all those lovely people, I thank particularly three of my closest colleagues and friends:

Juhana Toivanen, thanks for the humane glow.

Onni Hirvonen, thanks for the recognition.

Tero Vaaja, thanks for minding.

The intellectual, emotional, and material support from my loving parents, Eija and Arto, has been invaluable. I cannot thank you enough. Let alone my siblings Jussi (thanks for the wits), Johanna (thanks for being a perfect sister), and Juuso (thanks for the game minds and mind games).

Eventually, it comes down to this: Mankki, thanks for living, laughing and loving through all these years.

In Tübingen, Germany 11.4.2016
Jarno Hietalahti

LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

- I Hietalahti, J. The relevance of “social character” to humor studies. To be submitted for publication.
- II Hietalahti, J. 2015. Laughing at Oneself: On the New Social Character. In *Studies in Social & Political Thought* Volume 2 / Summer 2015. Special issue: *Pathologies of Recognition*. 116-131.
- III Hietalahti, J. 2015. Huumorin kahlittu vapaus. Teoksessa S. Knuuttila, P. Hakamies ja E. Lampela (toim.) Kalevalaseuran 94. vuosikirja: Huumorin skaalat. Esitys, tyyli ja tarkoitus. SKS. 19-35.
- IV Hietalahti, J. 2015. Kilpailun läpäisemä huumori. Teoksessa S. Knuuttila, P. Hakamies ja E. Lampela (toim.) Kalevalaseuran 94. vuosikirja: Huumorin skaalat. Esitys, tyyli ja tarkoitus. SKS. 379-392.

TABLES

TABLE 1	The three families of humor theories	18
---------	--	----

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

TABLES

1	INTRODUCTIONARY DISCUSSION	11
1.1	Brief Background	16
1.2	Fromm's Humanism	21
1.2.1	Society and Humanism	25
1.3	Fromm's Social Criticism and Humor	28
1.3.1	Critique of the Community of Laughters	32
1.4	Fromm on Paradoxes	38
1.4.1	Affirming Paradoxes.....	42
1.4.2	Paradoxes of Humor.....	44
1.5	Humane Humor.....	48
1.5.1	The Possibility of Humane Humor.....	51
1.6	Overview of the Articles.....	56
	YHTEENVETO (FINNISH SUMMARY).....	59
	REFERENCES.....	61
	ORIGINAL PAPERS	

1 INTRODUCTIONARY DISCUSSION

The economy of Czechoslovakia was ruined, and the Minister of Finance in trouble. No salvation was to be found and the state was basically in bankruptcy. As the minister himself could not find any kind of solution, he asked, if it was possible to find somewhere some wise man who could help them in this disastrous situation. One of the advisers of minister uttered that just outside Prague there should be a Rabbi, who is supposed to be a particularly wise man. Perhaps he could help?

In the moment of despair, minister decided to act. He conducted an official convey and traveled to meet the Rabbi. Finally, they arrived in the destination and minister, after all the official introducing, explained the situation. Humbly he asked if the Rabbi had any idea how the problem could be solved.

Rabbi thought for a moment and announced that he saw two possible solutions: a natural and a supernatural. Well, what is the natural solution, asked minister.

- The natural solution, obviously, is that the Messiah arrives and transforms the whole world to an Earthly Paradise. And, at the same moment, the financial troubles of Czechoslovakia are gone.

Mm... right... Well, what is the supernatural?

- You try to do it.

This joke was, according to Michael Maccoby (2014a), one of Frankfurt School critical theorist Erich Fromm's favorites, and apparently Fromm "loved good jokes" (Maccoby 1996, 84). Rainer Funk, Fromm's last assistant and the director of his literary estate, recalls that it was extremely difficult for Fromm "to refrain from telling a joke that suddenly came to his mind" (Funk 2009b, 65). A number of his contemporaries testify how Fromm's "eyes twinkled with impish humor" (Lesser 2009, 92) and how he thought that "confrontations could be lightened by using humor" (Lesser 2009, 92), or how he forged an emotional contact with his peers via laughter (Akeret 2009, 102). For Fromm, friendships included humor (Gourevitch 2009, 125), and evidently he "was never lacking humor" (Tauber 2009, 131), and even that he sometimes "laughed until he cried" (Silva Garcia 2009, 148). In all, it appears Fromm "had a wonderful sense of humor" (Maccoby 2009, 143) or "deep sense of humour" (Silva Garcia 1989, 245)

which he also used as a psychoanalyst to “relax his patients” (Schechter 2009, 81).

However, this dissertation is not primarily a study of Fromm’s sense of humor. Instead, the thesis concentrates on how Fromm’s work and thinking can be used to understand and analyse *the philosophy of humor*. I will refer to certain ways in which Fromm understood humor but I do not aim to make a profile of what could be funny or amusing in Fromm’s eyes. In the light of Fromm’s social theories, I offer a novel perspective on the general philosophy of humor and also to the cultural phenomena of humor and laughter. I do not neglect Fromm’s own taste in humor, but nevertheless, the goal of the study is to apply his ideas and works to contemporary phenomena. Of course, certain information about his personal style of joking will be connected to the philosophical analysis, but only to strengthen the general argument, or to stress a certain point of view.

In this dissertation, I will formulate certain Frommian principles for what I call humane humor. To do this, I will first discuss Fromm’s humanism to present the basic premises for my thesis. As I understand humor as a deeply social phenomenon, I will also handle the central features of Fromm’s social philosophy. After this, I move forward Fromm’s understanding of paradoxes and present a specific way to understand social and cultural paradoxes in the light of Fromm’s thinking. Finally, it is possible to discuss how humor could be humane in a profound manner.

As is often repeated among humor studies, explaining a joke is just like dissecting a frog. It’s a messy job, the frog dies in the procedure and nobody has any fun. Actually, Fromm argues that these kinds of dissections – when discussing an observation of a person – do not further our understanding of human behavior because they do not treat humanity as a living process: “If one tries to study one aspect of a personality apart from the whole, one has to dissect the person – that is to say, destroy his wholeness.” (Fromm 1979a, 23) Fromm claims that a living person can be understood only in relation to the constant process of change, that is, as an alive human being. I share the same concerns in relation to humor research. For this reason, I will not make any kind of analytical dissection of the joke that opened up this introduction. I hope, however, that the following pages do shed some light on the subject of humor and help the reader to make her own interpretation of Fromm and the above joke. For me, humor research is always about the wider context. The reason for this is quite Frommian¹: *a joke itself is not the same joke as in the telling situation*. One has to always consider who the narrator is, why he tells the joke, to what audience, in what situation, and so forth. This premise is congruent with what has been emphasized in many recent humor research conferences: the unofficial mission of modern humor research is to discover what is funny, why it is funny, to whom it is funny, and to what results it is funny (see also Kirsh and Kuiper 2003 for the multidimensional concept of sense of humor). To further,

¹ Miri (2014, 31) uses the intriguing term “Frommesque” but I have decided to stick to this more common version, “Frommian”.

strengthen and broaden this programme, in this research *I will focus mainly on the social and cultural significance of humor from a Frommian perspective.*

It is also worth mentioning that Fromm is a philosopher as well as a psychoanalyst and social critic, although he typically evades labeling. As well as a philosopher, Fromm has also been called a democratic socialist, a sociologist, a mystic, and a humanist – just to mention a few. I do not claim that Fromm should be understood first and foremost as a philosophical writer. Instead, my classification expresses that Fromm is relevant to the field of (academic) philosophy, as well as others. Fromm is a versatile thinker.² As David Ingleby (1991, li) has put it, to some psychoanalysts Fromm is too sociological but then again for some sociologists he is too much of an essentialist, or, for theologians he is too humanist and for Marxists too voluntaristic. Fromm drew from many different disciplines, and in my interpretation, this is not a lack or failing but instead an excellent philosophical starting point from which to study humor and its vagaries.

I need to clarify that my main focus here is on social philosophy, not merely on certain abstract concepts. A quotation from Fromm suits perfectly: “I have no gift for abstract thought. I can think only those thoughts that relate to something I can concretely experience.” (Fromm 1983/1986, 105.) This is what this dissertation will attempt: research on humor related to concrete experience of humor itself. Also, as Fromm says elsewhere, terminological questions are not of the greatest importance (Fromm 1960, 133), as “one should not (...) become more interested in the words than in the thoughts they express” (Fromm 1973/1992, 20). Still, one cannot ignore the conceptual sphere altogether, as Fromm’s written works demonstrate. He does handle his central concepts in depth, but his ultimate interest is not in crystal clear conceptual clarifications but in the thoughts they express. So, also for me, an adequate conceptual accuracy is enough to gain a handle on the more important ideas themselves. In this line of thinking, the object of the studies has a priority. In this dissertation, it means that I try not to forget what I am dealing with here, that is, humor.³

In my interpretation, socially critical philosophy is implicitly related to the question of what it means to be a human being. In this dissertation I attempt to explore the phenomena of humor and laughter as a part of “human nature”, so the study also can be located under the banner of philosophical anthropology. Sami Pihlström (2016), drawing from Heikki Kannisto’s works, distinguishes four general types of philosophical anthropology: essentialism⁴, naturalism⁵,

² There is an ongoing discussion whether Fromm has one (Braune 2015) or two voices (Maccoby 1996; Friedman 2013). As will be later shown, I believe that Fromm’s writings echo always the same humanism even if he handles his subject matters in different ways. To make a distinction between all his different styles and approaches, I am afraid two voices is not enough.

³ Fromm suggests that the proper age to start studying philosophy is around 30 and 40 years (Fromm 1955/1990, 346), so I am happily getting there.

⁴ Essentialists think that there is an unchanging essence of humanity, like reason or soul.

⁵ Naturalists argue that human beings are purely natural beings, that is, part of nature’s structure and nothing more.

existentialism⁶, and culturalism⁷. All of these aspects can be found in Fromm's works, and I locate my Frommian perspective on humor within the field of culturalism. For Fromm, human beings are creatures of nature, but we also transcend the natural limits of the animal world because we are self-conscious. According to Fromm (see e.g. 1962/2006, 133-139), we realize that the bond with nature is irreversibly cut, and still we have to act in the natural world. The very essence of humanity is based on this paradoxical situation, which is the cause of existential needs shared by every single human being. However, there is no universal way to solve these existential problems because, eventually, they have to be answered in a unique historical and cultural setting. My objective is to understand the role of humor and laughter in relation to this paradoxical essence of humanity. This will be elaborated upon in due course.

Humor is, of course, an interdisciplinary subject, and it is nonsense to think that only philosophy could solve the puzzle of humor. I do not claim that I can provide the ultimate answer to the question 'what is humor?', but even so, I believe my point of view is fruitful and it can be developed and built upon in later studies. Naturally, different academic disciplines, like history, art and literature, social sciences, gender studies, and psychology, offer important perspectives on humor, and they can be combined with the findings of the natural sciences. Alongside these research branches, I believe that a philosophical inquiry to the depths and core of humor is a worthy investigation. In this dissertation I claim that a Frommian perspective offers rich potential to widen our understanding about humor and its meaning for humanity. My goal is to analyze how humor and laughter are relevant for human life on a deeper social level. I argue that the concept of humor is dynamic and in a sense open-ended, as it is hard to reduce it to, say, biological concepts. Of course, it is possible to give an accurate explanation about, for instance, how many muscles are used when a human being laughs. However, this kind of physical definition hardly grasps the philosophical core which I am searching for. Instead, I hope to contribute to the understanding of the significance of humor and laughter for human beings from a critical humanistic perspective.

Generally, we are joking and laughing creatures, and these attributes make us unique – or at least uncommon – among other animals. However, I ask what the cultural significance of laughter is, and how humor constitutes humanity. Or, as formulated above: what does it mean to be a human being, and how is humor connected to this question? This is the guiding motive behind my thesis. I do not neglect the importance of various empirical investigations about humor – I believe Fromm's social philosophical insights can be tested empirically – but providing concrete empirical ways to study humor is not at the center of my philosophical research. Of course, the results of natural sciences have to

⁶ According to existentialism, humans have no fixed or ready properties or essence. We are only existing continuously, and we have to construct meaning and impose it upon the world.

⁷ Culturalism is a synthesis of the previous three: we are always remade through cultural settings which we have made. We cannot be reduced to scientific explanations because we can act freely and meaningfully in the world.

be taken under serious evaluation, and they can offer valuable data for humanistic thinking. However, it is problematic if there is a tendency to make universal claims about humor based on some clinical research in which the philosophy of humor is ignored. As mentioned, humor is an interdisciplinary subject; in this aspect, a mere attempt to define humor is insufficient, as the goal is to try to understand the significance of humor for humanity.

My method can be called *critical eclecticism*, or, *methodological and theoretical eclecticism*. I understand critical philosophy dialectically. In this dissertation, I accentuate Fromm's critical ideas to question the existing research and commonly shared ideas, and aim to offer new openings and perspectives.⁸ In this, I honor Fromm's way of thinking. In short, even if some theories appear to be incompatible, rejecting them immediately is unnecessary. This is partly what makes Fromm's ideas so fruitful. For instance, in the late 1920s he was one of the first to combine Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical thinking with Karl Marx's social philosophy. Freud, roughly speaking, focuses on the neuroses of the individual. Marx, also roughly speaking, discusses the meaning and form of society's construction. For most, a Freud-Marxian combination would be just a mismatch. But Fromm sees beyond these superficial contradictions, and builds new ideas and combinations. In regard to my dissertation, this means combining Fromm's ideas with humor research, and in doing so I aim to understand the current phenomena of humor and laughter.

My aim is to conduct research on Fromm's work in such a way that his ideas can be translated into language which also enables the study of the philosophy of humor. The central thesis of this dissertation is that *humor should be understood as a dynamic concept*. My claim is that *humor is not a static or fixed phenomenon but a part of ever-changing humanity*. Humor does not remain constant over history, and therefore *it is questionable to try to offer universal explanations about the nature of humor*. This insight offers a critical way to understand humor, and *it has significant effects for both science and society*. Other humor researchers (e.g. Oring 2003; Davies 2011) have emphasized how humor (its content, creation, form and perception) is dependent on context, but these studies have not made the connection between the philosophy of humor and humanism. Actually, Davies writes that it is important to study jokes because they are widespread and popular, but he denies that jokes generally have "any significant social consequences or express profound moral or existential truths" (Davies 2011, 2). It may be that the content of actual jokes rarely possesses such qualities, but this does not mean that humor is disconnected from the existential conditions and moral aspects of humanity. The following pages will shed more light on this idea and demonstrate the importance of this viewpoint on humor.

⁸ If and when Fromm becomes a mainstream figure in humor research, it is time to systematically criticize his shortcomings in relation to the topic.

1.1 Brief Background

Erich Fromm is rarely mentioned among humor studies. Similarly, the philosophy of humor is absent in research concerning Fromm. However, I claim that combining these two is of utmost importance and of great interest for humor studies and the philosophy of humor in particular. Thus, the import of this doctoral dissertation is (at least) twofold: it opens up a new branch in Fromm studies as well as in humor research. This introduction clarifies certain aspects of Fromm's thinking that are necessary to fully comprehend this dissertation's constituting articles. As the articles discuss in detail the ways in which Fromm's ideas are related to contemporary humor research, in this introduction I focus more on certain themes which I have not been able to open fully in the articles. Also, I discuss further some relevant implications which can be drawn from the articles. There are five essential aspects I will handle in this introduction:

- 1) Fromm's humanism
- 2) Fromm's social criticism
- 3) Paradoxical logic
- 4) Humor as a dynamic concept
- 5) Fromm's humane humor

I approach the discipline of critical humor research via the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory, the task of which is to analyze cultural phenomena via philosophical concepts and question unfounded cultural beliefs. Therefore, the goal of this dissertation is to challenge some widely shared conceptualizations about humor by the application of Erich Fromm's philosophical and socio-cultural work to humor research. In doing so, this dissertation will accentuate Fromm's critical ideas to question certain traits in existing research and common ideas, and aim to offer new openings and perspectives.

Fromm was raised in a Jewish tradition, and even though he officially turned away from Orthodox Judaism in 1926, he never lost his interest in Jewish philosophy which, I believe, had a great influence on how Fromm understands humor and society. Authors like Rainer Funk (2000) and Lawrence Friedman (2013) have examined Fromm's life already in depth, so apart from some observations about this, I leave the events of his life aside from this dissertation. I will concentrate on his radical social theory and explain how it can help to understand the phenomenon of humor.

Fromm's written works constitute a total oeuvre in which every piece fits together, as Knapp (1989) remarks. The existing Fromm literature is in one word vast, and I will not refer to all of it in this introduction. For example, in the Erich Fromm Institute in Tübingen alone there are currently some 5500 titles about Fromm in addition to Fromm's own reference library which includes around 3500 books, journals and collective volumes. Just to write a list of all these would take a book of its own (see Funk 1996). In the general aspects of

Fromm's thinking, I follow the primary commentators on Fromm's theories, such as Funk (1982), Daniel Burston (1991) and Lawrence Wilde (2004). As there are already many respectable commentaries on Fromm's overall writings, I will not go through his works book by book in this introduction. Instead, I focus on what I consider essential in regard to the philosophy of humor.

I argue that Fromm represents or adheres to the fundamental aspects of the Frankfurt's School's Critical Theory including the practical impetus for social change. Fromm's relation to the Institute for Social Research has been widely discussed. For instance, Joan Braune (2014) has gathered and analyzed a comprehensive discussion of the English texts handling the topic. Of course, Fromm's relation to the Frankfurt School has also been discussed, in German (e.g. Kessler & Funk 1992; Bierhoff 1993) and in Finnish (e.g. Moisio 2007) amongst others. I am not going to make here a specific case, for example, how Fromm joined the Institute in 1930 and left it in 1939 and all the possible reasons for this. Instead, I simply consider him as a critical theorist. This is mainly a premise which helps to locate one of Fromm's intellectual homes.

On that note, even though the sources used in this dissertation are mainly in English, one has to remember that there are plenty of, for instance, German, Italian and Spanish research about Fromm. In addition, Fromm has been an inspirational figure, for example, in Mexico, Russia, and in the countries of former Yugoslavia, and in Japan. It is worth mentioning that Fromm inspires different kinds of reading groups even today, and alone in Germany there are currently at least eight active study groups which hold regular meetings to discuss Fromm's theories (see Fromm Forum 2015, 66). In addition, Manfred Zimmer (2015, 35) reports there to be at least 89 master's thesis and 8 doctoral dissertations (and plenty of other contributions) about Fromm in Chinese. The disciplines around Fromm are various, and he has been connected to, for instance, evolutionary sociobiology, attachment theory, modern neuroscience, social psychology, and political psychology (see Levya 2014; Cortina 2015). It is clear from being both recently and widely discussed globally that Fromm has been and still is seen as a relevant, important thinker around the globe.⁹ Partially because of the global point, I have decided to add two Finnish articles in this dissertation. By this, I offer my contribution to the Finnish academic work and remind that Fromm is discussed also in Finnish.¹⁰ Naturally, this is not the only reason for my choice. I believe that these articles are significant for both Fromm and humor research.

As a general overview, there is a great number of meritorious studies about Fromm. Some of these emphasize Fromm's psychoanalytical theory and practice (e.g. Burston 1991; Cortina & Maccoby 1996; Funk 2009a), others focus on his studies on society (e.g. Braune 2014; Miri, Lake & Kress 2014), and some stress Fromm's humanistic position (e.g. Funk 1982; Knapp 1989; Wilde 2004;

⁹ For a very recent discussion on Fromm's relevance for the contemporary world, see Funk & McLaughlin 2015.

¹⁰ Interestingly, Fromm's mother's family migrated from Russia to Finland where they, for some unknown reason, converted to Judaism (Friedman 2013, 4).

Thomson 2009; Durkin 2014). There are also those who highlight Fromm's prophetic vision (e.g. Betz 1974; Pekkola 2010; Friedman 2013). In the middle of all the distinguished Fromm research, this dissertation is a humble but important addition. I claim that no one has yet written about Fromm and humor in the systematic way I do here. The reason for the lack of Fromm-inspired humor research is possibly quite simple: Fromm himself never studied the philosophy of humor explicitly, nor did he conduct research specifically on humor. Before discussing the work of Fromm and its importance for humor research, I will briefly outline the way in which I understand the concept of humor in this dissertation.

As Victor Raskin formulates, one can distinguish three overarching families of humor research: incongruity theories, hostility theories, and release theories (Raskin 1985, 31-36). Salvatore Attardo (2008, 103) specifies the different synonyms for these classifications in the chart below:

TABLE 1 The three families of humor theories

Incongruity	Hostility	Release
Contrast Incongruity/resolution	Aggression Superiority Triumph Derision Disparagement	Sublimation Liberation Economy

From the chart above, I understand the section "Hostility" mainly as an empirical observation. The theoretical claim of this portion is not plausible (humor is produced when one feels superior to other, laughter is a sign of triumph, and so forth, see e.g. Morreall 1983, 4-5; Critchley 2004, 2-3). If there is at least one humorous occasion which does not include any kind of hostility, the basic claim of the theory is refuted. I believe this can be easily done (see the last section of this introduction). There is also a conceptual problem with the way Attardo localizes aggression as a synonym for hostility; Fromm convincingly shows that there are several types of human aggression and not every form of them expresses hostility (see Fromm 1973/1992). In any case, even if this group of theories cannot be universally proven, these observations should not be bypassed. The hostility often found in humor is a sign of something, even though the superiority theory could not withstand analytical examination.

The different kinds of release (sometimes called relief) theories are worthy of discussion, also. The first names in this field were Herbert Spencer (1911) and Sigmund Freud (1905), who based their insights about humor on the mechanistic conceptualization of man.¹¹ They summed up different kinds of energy

¹¹ Fromm uses "man" as a synonym for human beings, and I consider it gender-neutral expression. Similarly, I sometimes use "he" and sometimes "she" without referring to genders. Hopefully these choices do not appear too dated or sexist to the reader.

flows, and measured how one can unload inner tension via laughter. The mechanistic calculations are not of great interest here, but the deeper idea is inspiring: in joking, we bypass different kinds of inner and outer obstacles.

Both of the previous fields of humor research offer important clues to understand the phenomenon of humor. However, theoretically, I understand humor in lines of the incongruity theory. The general idea is simple: when there is an incongruity between our expectations and what is perceived, humor is born. This means that there is a contradiction or a paradox¹² in the heart of humor. This basic outline has been noted by a number of great philosophers, such as, Francis Hutcheson (1750), Immanuel Kant (1790), Arthur Schopenhauer (1910), William Hazlitt (1819), and Søren Kierkegaard (1846).

One quickly observes that a mere incongruity is not a sufficient condition for humor to arise in a situation. There are plenty of incongruities that appear to be scary or sad, or just incomprehensible. Elliot Oring argues that humor depends upon the perception of what he calls *appropriate incongruity*. By this he refers to “the perception of an appropriate relationship between categories that would ordinarily be regarded as incongruous.” (Oring 2003, 1) Humor emerges when the incongruity violates, for instance, logic, or what is supposed to be normal, in a way that is comprehensible. For example: “Q: How do you know if the chef is a clown? A: When the food tastes funny.” In this joke, humor is dependent on two senses of the word funny: humorous and strange. Normally, if food tastes funny, it tastes strange and not humorous. However, in this joke the ‘funny taste’ refers in an appropriate way to the humorousness of the dish, as the chef is referred to be a professional humorist, that is, a clown. Also, the word clown has another meaning, as it can refer to someone who has failed to do his job. So, the chef can be called a clown in the sense that he has not been able to cook tasty food. Oring (2003, 12) admits that appropriate incongruity may not be a perfect definition of humor, but it clarifies at least a bit of the vagueness of the general incongruity theory.

Raskin and Attardo have tried to give a more detailed formulation about the incongruity theories in their respective linguistic approaches. For example, Raskin’s (1985) *Semantic Script Theory of Humor* based humor on the interpretation of scripts or frames. This theory has then been revisited by Attardo and Raskin to the version *General Theory of Verbal Humor*, which tries to cover the phenomenon more fully. So, besides the script, it also focuses upon logical mechanism, situation, target, narrative strategy, and language of the humorous example: that is, the joke. (Attardo & Raskin 1991.)

In addition to these theoretical formulations about humor, there is a bulk of research on humor’s effects and impacts. I call them clinical studies of humor. They do not generally focus on the philosophy of humor, but instead, take humor as a given, and try to measure its effects on different aspects of human life. For instance, some studies aim to figure out how humor and laughter improve health (e.g. McGhee 1999; Miller & Fry 2009), how they enhance social affairs

¹² Throughout the dissertation, terms “paradox” and “contradiction” are interchangeable.

(e.g. De Koning & Weiss 2002; Vecchio & al 2009), how artificial intelligence can be encoded to recognize and produce jokes (e.g. Mihalcea & Strapparava 2005; Nijholt 2014), or the ratio of benefits to harmful effects of laughter (e.g. Ferner & Aronson 2013).

For a wider discussion about different kinds of approaches on humor research, Attardo's comprehensive and thorough article "A primer for the linguistics of humor" (2008) is valuable. It covers over ten different theoretical approaches to humor, and goes through hundreds of publications. In addition, Raskin delivers an excellent outline of contemporary humor research (2008) which discusses different fields in of humor research across various disciplines and approaches (sociology, literature, verbal aspects, historical views, popular cultural studies, and so forth). For my project, the general idea of incongruity theory is of importance, as will be shown later.

The connecting element in all these explanatory theories of humor is that they all try to reach for the *essence* of humor. They all try to pinpoint the nature of amusement. This is a respectable mission, but also deserving of some criticism. As Arvo Krikmann (2006, 28) has pointed out, humor in its totality is such a huge and multifaceted phenomenon that it is practically impossible to incorporate it into a single integrated theory. For this reason, I focus on the social philosophical side of humor, and try to offer a new Frommian perspective on the subject matter in order to grasp the dynamic nature of humor.

If one wants to understand how Fromm's work can be related to humor research, the thread of his works, that is, his rational faith in humanism, cannot be left aside. The superficial paradox of faith and rationalism is a leading idea when interpreting Fromm: whatever Fromm writes, his writings are based on rationalism. Be it, say, about religion, mysticism, social theory or psychoanalysis, he always bases his insights on rational thinking, that is, on his socio-philosophical worldview which is rooted in scientific and biological premises. As Neil McLaughlin puts it, Fromm combines empirical methods with humanistic insights (McLaughlin 1998, 228). By scientific attitude, Fromm (1991b/2010, 64-65) means a certain kind of attitude of objectivity which cultivates the capability to wonder something nobody else has wondered before. The scientific attitude requires effort, work and thought in the middle of great uncertainty. This means that even science will not give complete certainty or easy security.¹³ According to Fromm, *truth is historically conditioned* (Fromm 1979a, 12). This is the ground from which I make my Frommian commentary on humor.

¹³ So, basically, Fromm is a humanistic scientist with faith. Like Maccoby (2014b, 15) I, too, think that social sciences are not value-free. It is practically impossible to achieve objectivity in the sense of value-freedom because science itself is a socially constructed practice (cf. Jukola 2014).

1.2 Fromm's Humanism

To understand Fromm's humanism¹⁴ one must be aware of his concept of man. Fromm bases his philosophical and psychological view of humanity strictly upon biology. For him, man is a freak of nature paradoxically produced by natural evolution (Fromm 1947/2003, 28; Fromm 1962/2006, 133). Fromm's basic biological principle is that all life aims to growth, and is always in the process of changing (Fromm 1967b, 3). From this starting point he formulates this ethical premise: the good is what promotes life, and the bad is what promotes death. Thus, there are two fundamental positions which he calls *biophilia* (love of life) and *necrophilia* (love of death¹⁵). "Good is reverence for life, all that enhances life, growth, unfolding. Evil is all that stifles life, narrows it down, cuts it into pieces." (Fromm 1973/1992, 406.)¹⁶ This tendency to grow and evolve has its relevance for human experiences and even to the way we form conceptualizations. Concepts, too, are alive, in a sense, and they should be understood in relation to the experience to which they give expression. "If the concept becomes alienated – that is, separated from the experience to which it refers – it loses its reality and is transformed into an artifact of man's mind." (Fromm 1966a/1991, 18.) To understand what growth is in human life, one needs to have an idea of the nature of man.

According to Fromm, there is a contradiction at the heart of humanity, and he emphasizes the paradoxical situation of human life in a number of his written works (e.g. 1947/2003; 1973/1992; 1976; 1992b/1994). Fromm argues that human beings are creatures of nature, but we also transcend the limitations of nature by being self-aware. Other animals, Fromm argues, are guided by instincts, but human beings are, in this sense, the most helpless of all animals. Instead of relying on instincts, we have to try to survive with the help of our developed brains, and eventually, our reason. The uniqueness of humanity is at the same moment a curse and a blessing so to speak. (Fromm 1947/2003, 28-29.) As there is a contradiction in the heart of humanity, one can talk about the essence of man, but it is not a fixed essence. Definitions and distillations like *Homo faber*, *Homo ludens*, *Homo negans*, and *Homo esperans* all reveal singular aspects of humanity, but eventually they are unable to untangle the question of what it means to be human (Fromm 1968/2010, 66-67). We can already note certain similarities with humor studies. According to the incongruity theory and its modern versions outlined previously, humor always plays with contradictions

¹⁴ Humanism penetrates Fromm's life and work as a number of Fromm scholars agree (e.g. Burston 1991; Horney Eckardt 1996; Wilde 2004; Durkin 2014). Here, I present my take on the subject matter as a premise for humor analyzes.

¹⁵ Here devoid of any sexual connotations.

¹⁶ Fromm has a tendency to operate through binaries in his written works, as Funk (1982, 168) lists: productive/nonproductive; active/passive; biophilic/necrophilic; growth/decay; being/having.

and paradoxes. If the fundamental conditions of humanity form a paradox, one could formulate that man may be a joke of nature.¹⁷

Fromm constructs his dynamic conceptualization of man from the aforementioned premises. Humanity is not anything fixed but it is always changing. Of course, human beings have certain bodily needs which have to be fulfilled, like hunger and thirst, but they do not define the essence of humanity. Instead of focusing merely on the physical needs, Fromm emphasizes the existential needs. (e.g. Fromm 1947/2003; 1955/1990; 1959b; 1973/1992.) These needs, such as the needs for relatedness, identity, rootedness, and transcendence, are all based on the premise that human beings are at the same time a part of nature, and yet they also transcend it. Fromm writes how man

is part of nature, subject to her physical laws and unable to change them, yet he transcends nature. He is set apart while being a part; he is homeless, yet chained to the home he shares with all creatures. (...) Being aware of himself, he realizes his powerlessness and the limitation of his existence. He is never free from the dichotomy of his existence: he cannot rid himself of his mind, even if he would want to; he cannot rid himself of his body as long as he is alive – and his body makes him want to be alive. (Fromm 1973/1992, 253.)

This is the starting point of human existence, and we all need to cope in this setting. Existence itself produces a problem which has to be solved. Typically, the circumstances in which individuals attempt to answer the problems of being are social. This leads Fromm to study the relationship between an individual and his society. However, answers given to the existential situation vary from time to time, so there is no clear-cut pattern for coping in the world. For example, guidance like “gain as much money as you can” is not really universally helpful. But before I handle this social level in any more depth, we need to take a glance on the existential needs in a bit more detail. They clarify the way how one can survive.

To survive, man needs to be sane. Sanity has certain conditions which have to be fulfilled. Fromm is straightforward here and clearly expresses that if man cannot, for example, relate to others he will fall into insanity. This is the ultimate question in the paradox of life: how to find unity with others, as one realizes that she is an individual and separated from nature and from other human beings. Fromm points out that people can satisfy this urge of relatedness in several ways, as one can submit to the power of others, or another can aim to control his fellow men. But to be in line with the principle of growth, Fromm suggests that this relatedness should be achieved in a loving way. (Fromm 1956b, 10.) Love here is not the same as, for instance, romance, but here it is defined as the feeling of togetherness where individuals affirm both a connection with and separation from one another. Fromm’s understanding is close to the biblical idea of love for neighbor and for stranger.

¹⁷ It might be rather odd to call humanity a joke. However, I propose this observation can be turned around: if humanity in its totality is a joke, perhaps we should give more value to humor and jokes, and not consider them unworthy by default.

In Fromm's view, everyone is an individual, yet everyone is part of a whole and shares the same humanity. Fromm further claims that everyone carries the whole humanity in herself; everyone is a saint and a sinner, a thief and a benefactor. This idea can be summed up in one of Fromm's favorite expressions, which Marx also used: "Nothing human is alien to me" (Fromm 1961, 94).

Fromm also clarifies his position using Biblical references. The notions such as God creating only one man, or that man is created in the likeness of God, are not to be taken literally (i.e. as meaning that there is a supreme creator): Fromm concludes that these sentences express the notion that no one can state that he is superior to others. This applies to all people, despite the differences between them. (Fromm 1992b/1994, 63.) In other words, there are individual differences between people, but these are completely meaningless in regard to their status as human beings. "Each individual is the bearer of all humanity and the task of man is to unfold the humanity within himself" (Fromm 1992b/1994, 66).

A secular reader may be curious about Fromm's choice of words: he speaks about God, love, humanism, good, evil, and so forth. I suggest that one should try to reach beyond these words and ponder the more general message. Fromm does not demand that one should believe in God in order to be good. He actually calls himself an atheistic Marxist who does God's work with all his power (Fromm 1967a).¹⁸ He also suggests that a universal humanism can be found in all the main religions (Fromm 1968/2010, 96). This is a striking claim when considering, for instance, all the wars between different religions, the ongoing confrontation between "McWorld and Jihad" (see Barber 1992), and the schisms between atheists and organized religions. For Fromm, it is not pivotal who believes in what entity or '-ism'. What matters, eventually, is who cares about other people (e.g. Fromm 1950a/1977, 114; 1992b/1994, 93). He tries to clarify this position with his systematic analysis about religions.¹⁹

As Fromm affirms, the Bible is an exceptionally important book for him not because he considers it to be God's word but because of the vision and principles the book expresses (Fromm 1966a/1991, 7). This idea is easily verified when one looks at Fromm's bookshelves in the Tübingen Institute. There are at least three copies of the Bible and a number of books about the psalms, and they all are full of small markings and notes. But even when reading the Bible, Fromm remains rational. His position on the Bible is located in radical humanism which means, for Fromm, "a global philosophy which emphasizes the oneness of the human race, the capacity of man to develop his own powers and to arrive at inner harmony and at the establishment of a peaceful world" (Fromm 1966a/1991, 13). In this sense, biblical writings are, as Fromm sees them, sharp criticism of modern times which are riddled with separation, wars and hatred. Despite shortcomings in relation to humanism, Fromm never grows

¹⁸ Fromm actually makes a distinction between Marxist, or revolutionary, atheism and "bourgeois atheism", see Fromm 1979b.

¹⁹ For a detailed take on Fromm and religions, see Lundgren 1998.

tired of the question of how an individual can achieve productive happiness in a culture.

This happiness is more than survival, and one of the conditions of humanity is the need to transcend. Fromm argues that it is psychologically unbearable to think that man is just a biologically determined creature who is thrown down to the Earth by destiny. Instead, man has to overcome this powerlessness. According to Fromm, this can be done in two ways. First, man can create life and new ideas. This kind of productive creation, however, is hard, so the other way to overcome the feeling of being just a predetermined biological lump, is to destroy life. Fromm writes that if a person cannot control his own life by creating things, he seeks this feeling of control by destroying things. Fromm clarifies that this destructive orientation is actually a secondary possibility if the ability to create is impeded for some reason or other. (Fromm 1956b, 12.)

The third essential human need is the sense of identity. Man has to be able to express that he is an "I". This can be done in a several ways. As the traditional bonds of, say, family, tribe and blood have been cut, a modern human being is an individual to an increasing extent. Fromm writes that man can enhance this self-identity in a positive manner which would entail the development of one's own creativity and productivity. The basic condition here is that an individual genuinely feels that he is the subject behind his own actions. If for some reason this is not possible, people can also try to fit into the surrounding group. On this occasion, one's identity is based on the feeling that one does not feel in any way different than, say, his neighbor. Thus, an individual has at least some kind of sense of identity as a part of the group. (Fromm 1956b, 13.)

Fromm also discusses the need for rootedness and for the frame of reference as well as for the object of devotion. To put it simply, the frame of reference is close to worldview and values. Fromm emphasizes that it is human nature to ponder what it means to be a human, what the nature of man is, and what the conditions to succeed in being a human are. This all is background for what are the truly meaningful and important matters in a life. (Fromm 1956b, 13-14.) The productive life is proceeding towards a new harmony with other people and also with nature. This progression is done by developing human powers. In order to do this, one has to eliminate greediness and egotism, and cherish respect and love towards others. (Fromm 1962/2006, 133-134.)

Fromm claims that one cannot observe human nature as such. However, there is a lot of circumstantial evidence for such a thing which Fromm draws upon to gain an idea of what is specifically human and common to all of us. There are plenty of shared manifestations of this common nature in different cultures and different individuals which point to common features of man. (Fromm 1992b/1994, 67.) I argue that humor is one of these common features, and it is based upon the existential problems mentioned above. In a Frommian way, the aim is to study and understand how people relate to humor, what humor expresses, where it comes from, how is it triggered, and so forth. My claim is that humor is based on the process how people answer to the existential

problems mentioned above. This suggestion will be clarified in the next chapters.

In the previous paragraph, I make an implicit suggestion that humor is a specifically human feature, but by this I do not claim that human being is the only animal who laughs. There have been studies which suggest that even animals, such like chimpanzees and rats (see Matsuasaka 2004 ; Panksepp & Burgdorf 2003), laugh and play. However my argument is based on the definition of humor as given earlier in this introduction: thus my assumption is that humor, if conceived of as a contradiction of cultural categorizations, is a unique human feature. Next, I will outline how Fromm's ideas about society and humanism can be joint together to build a ground to analyze how humor fits in this combination.

1.2.1 Society and Humanism

Fromm's *humanistic credo* (1962/2006, 133-139) sums up his idea of humanity. The crucial notion is that man is self-aware, and because of this man is inherently always in contradiction with himself; he is part of the nature and transcends it, and he always has to try to answer this problem of existence. This contradiction is the very essence of humanity. So, human nature is not fixed but it has to be understood as a dynamic concept. As Fromm states, there has been a vast catalog of answers to the problem, but according to him, these all can be put into two basic categories: the first attempts to 'go back to nature' and to regress to a prehuman form of existence in which one is not self-aware: or, second, attempts to progress and grow within the limits of humanity. One aspect of this second category is that one cannot remain passive, cannot make static her way of living, as that would violate the principle of perpetual growth and change. "Life means constant change, constant birth. Death means cessation of growth, ossification, repetition" (Fromm 1962/2006, 134).

So, we can see that the instinctual drives do not determine a human being's needs and life. Rather, the existential needs are based on specific human conditions in a specific historical situation. For example, it is utterly pointless to refer to man as good or bad, because there is no such essence. Fromm's concept of man is dialectic; people have potentiality to good and bad. For example, in his massive study of aggressiveness, Fromm's conclusion is that "(m)an is biologically endowed with the capacity for biophilia, but psychologically he has the potential for necrophilia as an alternative solution" (Fromm 1973/1992, 407).

The word solution is central here. Man needs to relate, but as he cannot return to nature – that is, to the state where one is not self-aware and is fully part of the nature – he has to find new ways to unite with other people. These solutions, according to Fromm, are always given in relation to the historical situation and cultural context. Thus, it is in a sense correct to state that every human being is an individual *and* that prevailing social circumstances determine our way of being. Humans are both individuals and social beings. Here Fromm's background becomes clear: He is a follower of Marx as well as a follower of

Freud.²⁰ But Fromm is not satisfied with the general answers they give; that everyone tries to get as much wealth as possible (Marx) or to have sex as often as possible (Freud), to make a slight oversimplifications.²¹ These kinds of fixed claims cannot and do not describe humanity for Fromm. Survival is, of course, key but it has to be done in relation to the existential needs in a productive way if one wants to succeed in the *art of living*. In this, the concept of *social character* is of utmost importance. I discuss this concept in length in article I, and will clarify it briefly in the next chapter.

Because of our social commitments, the possibility to fully grow in the human sense is often restricted and our attempts to understand our full humanity becomes incomplete. An essential aspect of Fromm's humanism is how we relate to strangers. The stranger, Fromm explains, is the one who is powerless, the one who is different from everyone else around him (Fromm 1966a/1991, 183). The stranger does not fit in the picture, so to speak. But even if the other does not share same way of living, system of belief, sex, or whatever, he shares the same humanity. Fromm opens up the biblical statement:

The principle is that the love for the stranger as another human being, as one who is nothing other than human (precisely because he does not share my blood, customs, religion), is rooted in one's knowledge of him – and this knowledge is based on the commonly shared experience of being a stranger, oppressed and suffering. (...) As long as I have not discovered the stranger as being human, I know myself only as the social being who is like all those with whom he shares the same customs and language. (Fromm 1966a/1991, 184.)

Humanism, then, is a philosophical idea based on biological premises. Fromm explains how there are four basic principles for humanism: "first, belief in the unity of the human race, that there is nothing human which is not found in every one of us; second, the emphasis on man's dignity; third, the emphasis on man's capacity to develop and perfect himself; and fourth, the emphasis on reason, objectivity, and peace." (Fromm 1966b, 117.) This idea of humanism has been present in different religions and philosophies for millennia. One of the highest formulations of this humanism is in the biblical idea of loving the stranger, Fromm argues. Loving one's neighbor – that is, a member of the same tribe, family, or other kind of similarity – is relatively easy, but love for the stranger, or the Christian doctrine of loving one's enemy, transcends this commandment. (Fromm 1966b, 118.) In various speech acts these kinds of statement are fairly general, but it is doubtful if this claimed openness is present when one encounters, say, a culture that approves of childhood marriage, or an individual who has committed an act of terrorism. Fromm is always critical towards inhuman

²⁰ Fromm explicates his Marxist and Freudian background in depth in *Beyond the Chains of Illusion* (1962/2006). Also, he has dedicated a number of passages, chapters and even whole books for Freud (see e.g. Fromm 1959a; Fromm 1979a), as well as for Marx (see e.g. Fromm 1961; Fromm 1992b/1994), and often for both in the same cover (see e.g. Fromm 1970/1991; Fromm 1981).

²¹ Naturally, both Freud's and Marx's theories are much more complicated and deeper than described here. Frommian take on Marx and Freud can be located from the sources of the footnote 20.

practices but he does not judge human beings to be categorally evil or unworthy. Humanism means an effort for understanding and a hope for the change for better.

My assumption is that in practice this Frommian assertion is easily forgotten. As Fromm himself remarks, it is easy to speak about different kinds of thought concepts “but they are nothing but words unless one’s actions in his daily life (...) are rooted in this human substance” (Fromm 1966b, 120). The central idea in Fromm’s humanism is to realize that “every one of us is the most important thing there is in the universe – and at the same time not more important than a fly or a blade of grass” (Fromm 1955/1990, 203). In relation to this dissertation, the humanistic claim of respecting the whole humanity also touches upon humor. This means that even humor is parallel to humanism. If humor is, as incongruity theory suggests, always about comparison, there has to be some ground from which humorous occasions are perceived and to which they are compared. Following Fromm, universal humanism is the ground from which humor should be evaluated. Of course, it is possible to base humor on the principles of, say, power and dominance, or struggle for economic success. Fromm’s (e.g. 1941/1994; 1947/2003; 1955/1990) argument, however, is that caring humanism, or what he calls *productive character orientation*, is always a better basis than the urge to subordinate others with power. The former is, Fromm argues, a more sane option, it is *objectively better* for human beings. In this, I share Fromm’s ethical principle; life and growth are a better option than death and destruction.²²

Fromm’s main interest is in the question of how deeply the surrounding society and social groups affect everyone within them. He is certain that these social groups cannot define humanity, and they can never state who can be left aside. In a sense, to be fully human, everyone has to try to break the artificial chains, and still try to achieve some connection with every other human being. This is, in short, the humane freedom. Fromm’s concept of freedom does not refer to absolute positive freedom, that is, a total lack of external restrictions. There are plenty of external things which have an influence on us. One central thing are the social circumstances one is born in – that includes, besides cultural and economic facets of the society, family, school, and friends. These elements constitute a drastic factor in everyone’s life. Even though we are free, we cannot get completely rid of these or be totally indifferent to others. Freedom cannot be separated from the idea of relatedness. (cf. Fromm 1941/1994.)

As Fromm sees human beings as social beings, the central question is how humanism can be promoted in the social level. Eventually, Fromm believes, it comes down to social practices and institutions (Fromm 1966b, 121). The great interest of my project is to analyze how humor fits in this picture, via a critical evaluation. Next, I will focus on this aspect.

²² There are two main camps on Fromm’s borderless humanism: for example, John H. Schaar (1961, 6), Maccoby (1996, 65) and Friedman (2013, 116) accuse Fromm for being too unscientific and prophetic in his humanism; Wilde (2004, 54), Durkin (2014, 6-7) and Braune (2015, 91) defend his position.

1.3 Fromm's Social Criticism and Humor

Humans are social beings for Fromm. One cannot get rid of the need for relatedness:

The desire for interpersonal fusion is the most powerful striving in man. It is the most fundamental passion, it is the force which keeps the human race together, the clan, the family, society. The failure to achieve it means insanity or destruction – self-destruction or destruction of others. (Fromm 1956a/2000, 17.)

The crucial question, then, is how a society is to serve the fulfillment of inherent human needs. A society can have an inhibiting influence on human beings, but it can also further their growth. Unfortunately, Fromm writes in 1962, so far societies have typically been in conflict with humanity, so to rectify this the society should share the universal norms of humanity (Fromm 1962/2006, 135).

Fromm's social criticism²³ is aimed at social constructs which dehumanize man: that is, which restrict growth. As everyone is a social being, so humanity is essentially social. This is the dialectic nature of Fromm's social philosophy: Everyone is an individual but still a part of a greater whole. As humanism is at heart social, so societies must aim towards humanism. Thus, one can evaluate the worth and success of societies by examining how they promote human growth. As Fromm points out: "The more human a society is, the less need is there for the individual to choose between isolation from society or from humanity. The greater the conflict between social aims and human aims, the more is the individual torn between the two dangerous poles of isolation." (Fromm 1962/2006, 95.)

The relationship between an individual and the wider group is an essential question recurring throughout Fromm's written works. For him, succeeding in living in social circumstances is a hard task, and it is actually an art (Fromm 1947/2003, 13). The question is how one can discover and develop her own identity *and* be connected to others, in a way that ensures there is still genuine growth and joy. For example, succeeding in the game of economic growth does not guarantee succession in human growth. Money, power, or social prestige are eventually of little inherent worth in the humanistic framework.

Society and the individual should not be seen, however, as opposites. Society is always formed by concrete individuals and, on the other hand, an individual can only live as a social being. The central issue is how to organize a society to fulfil the needs of its members. The relationship is in a sense dialectical: Fromm reminds us how every individual's "life practice is necessarily determined by the life practice of his society or class and in the last analysis, by the manner of production of his society". (Fromm 1992a/2010, 58.)

²³ A wide group of authors consider Fromm as a social critic (e.g. Pekkola 2010; Friedman 2013; Braune 2014). In this chapter, I focus on those writings by Fromm which are necessary to the critical humor research.

Fromm argues that productivity is the key to succeed in living, as man “must produce in order to live”. By this, he does not refer to, say, the modern economic idea that mass production of objects is good in itself. Instead, productivity is closely connected to human development and to humanistic ethics. Generally, productivity is a mode of relatedness which covers every aspect of human experience, and which is possible for everyone: “Productiveness is man’s ability to use his powers and to realize the potentialities inherent in him.” (Fromm 1947/2003, 61-62.)

If a society does not promote humanistic growth and productiveness, Fromm concludes, it can be sick. If everyday routines and objectives of life are biased towards decay, the whole society might become insane. (Fromm 1955/1990.) This leads to the notion that those things and customs widely considered normal can actually be pathological (Fromm 1991b/2010). This, in turn, raises a concern about humor and laughter. The way people laugh at certain things and/or at certain points does not guarantee that this laughter is a positive force. Even if in a society there is some shared way of producing and enjoying humor, it can be opposed to humanistic ideals and thus to the promotion of human growth and living.

Fromm argues that it is important to realize how deeply society influences its individuals. It has its effect on thoughts, feelings, ambitions, and even logic: “For instance, in a pre-industrial culture people may not perceive certain things in terms of their commercial value, while they do so in an industrial system” (Fromm 1962/2006, 87). In relation to humor, this means that some ideas can appear ridiculous because they do not fit into one’s conceptualization (cf. Fromm 1979a, 14). The quasi-mythical tale of the purchase of Manhattan is a nice example of this. In the modern framework, it sounds quite ludicrous that part of the center of contemporary Western economy was bought by the Dutch traders for just a fistful of dollars’ worth of goods from the Native Americans. One could think that as the price was ridiculously low also that the natives were ridiculous. But the difference between categorizations is in play here: for the Native Americans, the biddings of the Dutch traders might also be quite amusing if one believes that nobody owns land.²⁴ In short, the surrounding society has a tremendous effect on the way people think, feel and perceive. Our ways of living and modes of relatedness and even our conceptual systems and categories are developed in a social setting (Fromm 1962/2006, 87). Following this line, also humor is a social phenomenon at its heart even though every single individual has a unique sense of humor.²⁵

²⁴ I do not make any historical claims here, just an illustration to elicit a point. This version of the tale involves certain mythical elements which are not historically tenable. For a more accurate take on the event, see e.g. Soniak 2012.

²⁵ For instance, Liisi Laineste (2008; 2009) has presented an interesting case how humor, and especially joking, is deeply political; she argues that the current political system is a crucial feature on how the butt of the joke is chosen in ethnic jokes.

Fromm describes the relation of an individual to a wider social group with the concept of social character.²⁶ I have discussed this concept in length in the first article of this dissertation, but to give a brief introduction: in short, social character explains how the socio-cultural-economic base level influences the superstructure of society and even the consciousness of single individuals. Generally, a social character makes people want to do what they have to do in order to keep the society running. This concept explains how an individual and a society intertwine. Fromm clarifies:

The concept of social character refers to the matrix of the character structure common to a group. It assumes that the fundamental factor in the formation of the social character is the practice of life as it is constituted by the mode of production and the resulting social stratification. The social character is that particular structure of psychic energy which is molded by any given society so as to be useful for the functioning of that particular society. (Fromm 1981, 27.)

In the first article, I argue that humor is part of social character. Also Fromm gestures in the same direction when he discusses how the social character is reinforced, among other phenomena, by jokes. He is certain that the favorite jokes of a society are an important piece of evidence of the total character matrix. (Fromm 1981, 35-36.)

The character²⁷, in general, is a crucial concept in Fromm's works. It is the human counterpart of an animal's instincts. As we do not have the capacity to think through every single one of our actions, character formation makes acting in the world easier by working to enable an individual to act in a consistent way without examining each aspect of her actions in detail, and it is present in the way an individual thinks, feels, communicates, makes decisions, and, importantly, laughs and tells jokes. Character, then, is the structure which helps us to cope and survive. *I suggest that humor should be seen in relation to the total character structure. Or to put it other way, the way one relates to and perceives humor is actually a character trait.*

Humor, then, is part of a social character. Different kinds of character orientations are ways to relate to the world, and they reveal how one truly sees and understands one's surroundings. The common character of a society is an image of its time. (e.g. Fromm 1947/2003, 39-45; 1962/2006, 57-69; 1973/1992, 282-299.) It is worth noting that it is possible to empirically test Fromm's philosophical and social psychological insights, and based on these ideas one can conclude if, in the wide picture, a society values biophilic or necrophilic attitudes.

As life for Fromm is about growth and change, Fromm believes that an essential element in humanity is spontaneity, a concept which he used before embracing the concept of productiveness (see Fromm 1947/2003, 61). Fromm de-

²⁶ For detailed analysis of different kind of character orientations, see e.g. Fromm 1941/1994; 1947/2003; Funk 1982.

²⁷ Funk (1982, 27-28) remarks how Fromm makes a clear distinction between a dynamic character and an unchangeable temperament, and argues that mere behavior is not enough to explain character. One has to recognize both the conscious and unconscious motives to understand why people act as they do.

finer spontaneity negatively: "Spontaneous activity is not compulsive activity, (...) it is not the activity (...) which is uncritical adoption of patterns suggested from outside." (Fromm 1941/1994, 257.) Instead, spontaneous activity is related to an individual's emotional and intellectual experiences, and Fromm claims that "there is nothing more attractive and convincing than spontaneity" (Fromm 1941/1994, 257, 259). In his later writings, Fromm describes this kind of being as "inner activity, the productive use of human powers" (Fromm 1976, 111) which is not selfish nor egocentric. Here we come to a critical distinction about humor: spontaneous, humane humor and produced, calculated humor. I propose that Fromm's criticism of the entertainment industry, and produced comedies as a part of it, is based on this difference.

A critical stance (cf. Horkheimer & Adorno 1944, 94-136) towards industrialized entertainment states that it always sells to the audience essentially the same comedies which are calculated to trigger laughter at certain moments. In these productions, there is only rarely any kind of spontaneous humor. Instead, humor is a product of consumption made for an audience of consumers, and this is strictly contradicted with the Jewish idea about the essence of humor which I will explicate in the next chapter. *My suggestion is that spontaneous humor is non-instrumental amusement, and it is an expression of a humanistic worldview.* Humor, in its spontaneous form, is an instant way to relate to the world and to others. If, however, humor becomes a tool used for some purpose, be it oppression, pleasing, money-making, or something else, it loses its spontaneous element. There is a difference between someone, say, sending a witty e-mail to her friend, and someone sending a witty e-mail expressly to delight her friend or to make her laugh. Even if the intent is good, the latter is in a sense instrumental, as there is already a hint of a calculating spirit present.

Spontaneous humor is an expression of humane relatedness in a precise moment. It does not need to aim at laughter or delight. Humor might have such effects, but they need not be the goals. In addition, unique moments of shared humor need not be repeated and highlighted. As Fromm writes, spontaneity can be considered as "a sensuous pleasure that is not stereotyped" (Fromm 1941/1994, 259). Spontaneous humor, then, might trigger laughter and promote joy, but it is not aimed at entertaining others. Spontaneous humor is freed from instrumentality.

When humor is given a purpose, say, to bring money to the producers and to entertain, it becomes artificial in a Frommian view. Here Fromm's humanism again takes a central role: "If a person fails to attain freedom, spontaneity, a genuine expression of self, he may be considered to have a severe defect" (Fromm 1955/1990, 15). So, if produced humor is not connected to these elements, it can be called pathological humor. Fromm is, obviously, a demanding thinker; even humor cannot escape from the grip of humanity.

In short, Fromm's criticism targets the dulling effect of amusement and leisure time in which an individual remains passive: "entertainment is an industry like any other, the customer is made to buy fun as he is made to buy dresses and shoes. The value of the fun is determined by its success on the mar-

ket, not by anything which could be measured in human terms.” (Fromm 1955/1990, 136.) Of course, fun is not exactly the same as humor, but comedies and such can be seen as a part of the ‘fun industry’.

Fromm offers biting criticisms of humor following philosophers like Epicurus, Plato, Aristotle, and Spinoza: in Fromm’s view, people often falsely equalize pleasures such as fun with happiness (1947/2003, 129-131). True, humor is said to bring people together (e.g. Ervin-Tripp & Lampert 2009), to offer a moment of relief (e.g. Morreall 2009), to benefit different kind of organizations (e.g. Robert & Yan 2007), and the like. Fromm’s argument would be that none of these is actually as positive a thing as one might think. If humor is not related to human growth and productive relatedness, it probably does not serve humanity. In this setting, the moment of laughter is worth very little, even though there is a tendency to emphasize, for instance, the health benefits of laughter.

Humor and laughter are always intertwined with the social realm because the current socio-economic-cultural setting always influences individuals. It has its impact even upon private thoughts and attitudes, such as ethical standpoints. For example, Fromm writes how in a capitalistic society the ideal of loving one’s neighbor is basically formulated by the idea of fairness. Even love becomes an exchange in this kind of circumstances; one gives love as much as the partner gives back (Fromm 1956a/2000, 117). As I emphasize in the introduction and in every article, this kind of attitude is also present in relation to humor. Humor, smiles, laughter – they all appear to be commodities, if one exaggerates slightly. Humor is offered, in this picture, for own personal gain. Fromm demands how one ought to be able to “share experience (...) rather than, at best, share in profits” (Fromm 1956a/2000, 120).

For Fromm, spontaneous and productive action is a deep experience, which always has an effect on the individual. Pleasures, on the contrary, are often hollow as they do not really touch the consumer. They do not change the person. (Fromm 1955/1990, 136-137.) If human life is about growth, even amusement should promote it. Here lies the harsh Frommian demand for humor. His critique is that having fun is actually a means to run away from oneself, that is, one does not have to be aware of herself while having a good time (Fromm 1955/1990, 165-166). I conclude from Fromm’s criticism that *to be humane, humor should challenge inveterate habits and promote growth, offer new perspectives and give something to think about.*

1.3.1 Critique of the Community of Laughers

As has been seen, Fromm is deeply critical towards cultural ways of living. One has to admit that he makes a number of oversimplifying claims about the nature of entertainment. For instance, he suggests that brutality in comic books and movies is a plausible explanation for youth violence, and how the comic-book industry in general poisons the mind of the public (Fromm 1955/1990, 175, 334). His answer to the problem is that there should be regulatory laws to restrict production of movies and comics, and if these laws are not effective, then “certain industries, such as the film industry, must be socialized, or at least

competing industries must be created, financed with public funds.” (Fromm 1955/1990, 334.)²⁸ These kinds of suggestions, obviously, demand much stronger evidence than Fromm offers. Remarks like the above are quite easy targets for criticism.

The sort of apparently weak formulation like the movies example do not dispel the importance of Fromm’s thought. Instead, they show how Fromm is a thinker of his own time, and how certain points in his works need to be interpreted in relation to his background. Fromm grew, as it has been briefly mentioned, in a traditional Jewish family in which reading and studying was always appreciated. After he escaped the Nazi regime to United States, the clash of cultures must have been overwhelming. The huge, popular and commercialized industry of amusement was ubiquitous, and it just did not easily fit into his background. For example, Fromm considered television a hypnotic device which did not leave room for genuine inner experience, and the watcher actually lost a bit of his freedom (Fromm 1983/1986, 93). In this regard, Fromm was a stranger in the middle of all the fun (cf. Fromm 1983/1986, 98-99).²⁹ In addition, I believe that *Fromm’s way of exaggerating certain aspects is pedagogical*. In this way, he challenges the readers to think thoughts of their own. Thus, it is more important to try to reach the idea of the author, instead of focusing on some slightly careless wordings. It is more important to relate Fromm’s concern about movies and comics to the idea of humanism.

It has been noted that Fromm repeatedly refers to “modern man”, the “average person”, and the “normal person”, or generalizations like “most people”. As Mika Pekkola remarks, talking about a “normal person” is an abstraction and does not refer to any actual living human being (Pekkola 2010, 58). Interestingly, Fromm himself affirms in an interview that he refers to most people, “but we have no statistics on this, so perhaps I should be more cautious and just say ‘many people’ or better still ‘most of the people I have seen in my practice as a psychoanalyst’” (Fromm 1983/1986, 61). I believe that the root of the previous kinds of formulations is in Fromm’s position as a social theorist: He is always critical but never judgmental. In my reading, Fromm rarely judges individuals but is always critical towards societies which, obviously, are formed by individuals. On a general level, the surrounding society appears to be quite insane but Fromm always has hope for every individual, and naturally, for a society also. His works reflect his faith in humankind, and this faith “is based on the conviction that there are potentialities in man which in the course of history are bound to carry him to a social order which is governed by equality, justice and love.” (Fromm 1942, 315)

²⁸ This suggestion might sound a bit harsh, as it could be easily interpret to point towards something like an official way of having fun. However, publicly funded companies like the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yle) have both arguably produced remarkable humor programs.

²⁹ McLaughlin illustrates that Fromm was a politically radical but culturally conservative scholar “who sang Hasidic songs until the end of his life” (McLaughlin 1998, 225).

As mentioned, Fromm demands that a society ought to promote activity and productivity. Humanity is a constant process, a never-ending renewal, and for this reason one cannot offer frozen solutions to the aforementioned existential problems. However, the logic of the culture industry appears to do precisely that. As long as a certain form of comedy, for example a sketch show, brings money to the table, the show will be continued. This, typically, is dead humor. Many shows, I claim, are bound to repeat old patterns and they cannot offer anything genuinely new. But because humor is bound to humanity, humor also has to be a constant process of growth. From a Frommian perspective, this is what should be promoted even in the middle of produced humor. I will share some preliminary outlines for this in the last chapter of the introduction.

Even though Fromm is in many ways disappointed with the culture of consumption, he has strong faith in humanity and, logically, also in societies. He is hopeful and yet demanding, and eventually, even societies must be based on the biophilia, love for life in its every form. Fromm argues that a society's change for the better demands an overall change: It is not enough to have an economical revolution, nor cultural, nor social – but all of these must happen jointly. Just as important as the change of society is the inner revolution of individuals, that is, a certain kind of spiritual change. This demands change in the character structure of individuals. (Fromm 1968/2010, 151-152.) This, I conclude, also demands changes in humor.

The problem of every individual in every society is the same: "how to overcome separateness, how to achieve union, how to transcend one's own individual life and find at-onement." (Fromm 1956a/2000, 9.) I add that humor and laughter are certain kinds of answers to these problems, or to put it more strictly, they are signals and symbols of the solutions which people have found. For example, humane love-filled connection with others produces a different kind of relation to humor and joking than a connection which aims at oppressing and destruction. Humane humor is different from authoritarian humor, and the motives behind humor are different; the first is related to productive joy and it offers insightful realizations about nature and life. The latter aims at humiliating, belittling, and separation.

It is becoming clear that general values in a society do not necessarily guarantee a productive human life for every individual. Instead, there can be several oppressive mechanisms, and humor can work as one such tool, as discussed in the articles of this dissertation. Here lies the importance of social criticism which demands the sensitivity to question the prevailing truths. Fromm explains how, for example, what we call the common sense might be the ruling thought pattern only because it "repeats the same nonsense over and over, and makes sense only because everybody repeats it" (Fromm 1963a/2004, 133). This is an important notion for critical humor research, and it is one of the central ideas of my project and recurs in the second, third and fourth articles in this dissertation. In the articles of this dissertation, I question the moral high ground of self-ridiculing (article II), and criticize the way to understand humor as a base for freedom (article III), as well as the supposed innocence of the different

kinds of humor competitions (article IV). Elsewhere I have also argued that humor can be seen as a form of violence (Hietalahti 2010), and criticized the thought that humor must always challenge boundaries of morality and good taste (Hietalahti 2014). All of these texts are critical of shared beliefs about the goodness and positivity of humor and laughter. Thus, they are also critical analyses of the contemporary society.

To be critical means to be able to be disobedient, to be able to say no to what the majority announces or commands. This means criticisms directed towards power. (Fromm 1981, 17; 1963a/2004, 133.) I believe that it is extremely arduous to stand against the community of laughers. If the general atmosphere suggests that laughter is always good and humor is the key for a better life, it is hard to try to make a counterargument when everyone is laughing around you. True, humor and laughter can be intoxicating. The critical notion is, however, that possible funniness does not justify anything by itself.

An example from 2012 clarifies the previous thoughts. According to different media sources, stand-up comedian Daniel Tosh was performing in Hollywood and telling a joke after joke about rape. One female member of the audience stood up and shouted that rape jokes are never funny. According to media, Tosh responded by stating: "Wouldn't it be funny if that girl got raped by like, five guys right now? Like right now? What if a bunch of guys just raped her..." The woman was stunned and left with her friend. She reported afterwards how humiliating it was, especially as Tosh's response made the audience guffaw even more. (e.g. McGlynn 2012; Bassist 2012.)

The woman's act can be seen as an act of disobedience. She did not bow to social pressure but instead followed her own values and commitments and tried to make an effort. She could not stay put and say nothing, or leave quietly. She thought that rape is always damaging, and it should not be laughed at. As the influence of the surrounding society is powerful, it is hard to defend one's moral beliefs among the community where everyone else is roaring with laughter, especially if the laughter is directed at one's beliefs themselves.

Naturally, a controversy erupted. Anti-sexual assault groups attacked Tosh's sense of humor (Emery 2012), but other comedians defended him and appealed to freedom of speech (Holpuch 2012). Tosh (2012) tweeted twice about the occasion: "the point I was making before I was heckled is there are awful things in the world but you can still make jokes about them. #deadbabies", and later, "all the out of context misquotes aside, I'd like to sincerely apologize." Elsewhere, Tosh has mentioned that he is no misogynist or racist, "(b)ut I do find those jokes funny, so I say them" (Hibberd 2011).

In the Tosh case, one can find (at least) two general positions on the relationship between humor and morality. The first states that morality is superior to or trumps funniness. Supporters of this position think that there are certain topics that cannot or should not ever be laughed at. According to them, there is never anything funny to be said, say, about rape or racism. If people joke about or laugh at such controversial topics, they are tasteless and lack genuine moral understanding.

The opposite of the previous camp is made up of those who say that we have to be able to joke about everything. Even if someone is too rigorous and gets offended by a joke, we should not limit the joy of others with any restrictions. For this camp, humor is the last bastion of freedom of speech, and for them, it is impossible and an authoritarian idea to restrict humor and laughter. In this sense, morality is inferior to amusement in joking occasions.

This debate shows, in my opinion, how important it is to understand the dynamic nature of humor. First of all, one cannot separate humor from morality, they are always intertwined. But this does not mean that moral commitments would restrict the topics of the jokes. Moral sense cannot dictate what can be called humor, even though thinkers like André Comte-Sponville (2001) and Marie Collins Swabey (1961) have argued otherwise. On a technical level, everything can be joked about, and jokes containing any kind of topic can be found funny – even if there is a word “rape”.³⁰ This does not, however, make this kind of joking positive or good. *My suggestion is that to evaluate humor it must always be considered in relation to humanistic values.* Also, my interpretation is that we cannot make, for instance, laws that would make it illegal to joke about certain subjects. That would be to misconstrue the nature of humor.

There are plenty of brilliant comedians who are able to joke about even the hardest topics. What has to be realized is that handling a topic in a humorous manner does not necessarily mean that the joker wants to denigrate the target of a joke. Humanistic humorists are able to illustrate a funny picture about, say, disabled people, but it does not mean that they are against disabled persons in general. Instead, they might show how the attitudes of so-called normal people appear to be questionable; how they are unable to relate to the disabled person as a full, genuine human being – a joke might state that it is ridiculous even to categorize people based on disabilities. Instead, as people make artificial categorizations so easily, the joke might actually reveal our limitedness to be open to the world. This kind of humor, even if there are some controversial words in the written lines, might be revealing and humane in a Frommian sense.

Actually, Fromm offers a possibility for truly critical humor when he discusses the role of art. Great art, Fromm explains, can tear down the veils of societal illusions. It has revolutionary potential “because it touches upon the reality of man and questions the reality of the various transitory forms of human society”. (Fromm 1968/2010, 80.) This revolutionary power of art is present also in the works of most daring comedians, I argue. Fromm makes this comparison: “The artists have been the court jesters of all past history. They were permitted to say the truth because they presented it in its particular but socially restricted artistic form.” (Fromm 1968/2010, 81.) Implicitly, court jesters have been able to speak the truth in their humor. They have been able to criticize what they saw in the society. Fromm points out that often jokes and cartoons manage to illus-

³⁰ Consider this discussion between humorist Stephen Fry and journalist Jonathan Mades who asks if there is anything Fry does not do: ‘Hm. (...) I’m afraid I can’t really think of anything. Well I don’t strangle kittens or rape nuns, but I’m assuming this is about things we...’ ‘...about things we don’t do which most of humanity does, exactly. Nothing?’ (Fry 2010, 319.)

trate a critical perspective on the society (e.g. Fromm 1963a/2004, 148; 1964/2010, 53; 1989/1997, 44; 1991b/2010, 18). However, Fromm is once again bitterly pessimistic about the critical potential of produced humor. For the majority, culture is just a phenomenon of and for consumption, and so is humor as a part of it. (Fromm 1968/2010, 81.)

Fromm's social criticism encourages us to examine the community of laughers. Why do people, in certain historical periods, laugh at certain topics, and ridicule certain phenomena? How do they relate to others with their laughter? If there is a shared passion for mocking the shortcomings of others, where does this striving come from? These are the central social philosophical and psychological questions around critical humor research. One way to answer, as previously discussed, is to study the ways of relatedness. If people in their laughter, for instance, aim at conformity of the group, laughter is shared. This trait, however, has its flip-side:

If I am like everybody else, if I have no feelings or thoughts which make me different, if I conform in custom, dress, ideas, to the pattern of the group, I am saved; saved from the frightening experience of aloneness. (...) One can only understand the power of the fear to be different, the fear to be only a few steps away from the herd, if one understands the depths of the need not to be separated. (Fromm 1956a/2000, 12-13.)

This conformity lacks individuality. Even though we live in an age of extreme individualism, Fromm actually argues that people have lost their individuality. They consume the same amusements, and have same emotions and ideas as everyone else. Fromm argues how in the modern society even "(f)eelings are prescribed: cheerfulness, tolerance, reliability, ambition, and an ability to get along with everybody without friction. Fun is routinized in similar, although not quite as drastic ways." (Fromm 1956a/2000, 13-14, 16.)

Contemporary cultural humor, I propose, often appears to have the previous kind of unifying and dulling effect. The produced comedies and the little jokes in everyday encounters promote sameness of everything. This, in relation to Fromm's demand for growth, is frozen humor which does not enable productivity and progression. Instead, produced humor appears to be against what Fromm calls creative activity (e.g. Fromm 1956a/2000, 16-17).

If one aims to produce humor that is as funny as possible, and tries to locate patterns for this, humor becomes what Fromm might call an idol. Idols are, Fromm writes, certain kind of frozen manifestations of power or hope. "An idol represents the object of man's central passion (...) May it suffice to say that the history of mankind up to the present time is primarily the history of idol worship, from the primitive idols of clay and wood to the modern idols of the state, the leader, production and consumption". (Fromm 1966a/1991, 43.) The same criticism also concerns produced humor. If societal slogans and maxims state something like, "Laugh when you can! Joke around!", or as Fromm often quotes "Never put off till tomorrow the fun you can have today." (e.g. Fromm 1963a/2004, 87), one should be cautious. To reveal the ideological trappings of and unfounded beliefs about humor is the main task of critical humor research.

Fromm's social criticism can be capsulized in a group of critical questions of modern, real, paradoxes. They are paradoxes between humanistic values and perceived reality:

Does it make sense to spend millions of dollars on storing agricultural surpluses while millions of people in the world are starving? Does it make sense to spend half of the national budget on weapons which, if and when they are used, will destroy our civilization? Does it make sense to teach children the Christian values of humility and unselfishness and, at the same time, to prepare them for a life in which the exact opposites of these virtues are necessary in order to be successful? (...) Does it make sense that we live in the midst of plenty, yet have little joy? Does it make sense that we are all literate, have radio and television, yet are chronically bored?" (Fromm 1962/2006, 92-93.)

1.4 Fromm on Paradoxes

Even though Fromm never studied humor explicitly, he repeatedly refers to jokes (e.g. 1941/1994, 192; 1966c; 1970/1991, 171), laughter (e.g. 1973/1992, 72; 1983/1986, 112), smiling (e.g. 1960, 19; 1991a/1998, 170), and comedies (e.g. 1941/1994, 131; 1989/1997, 80) throughout his written works and lectures. Also, his personal library reveals that he had access to classical and contemporary theories of humor. There are copies of, among others, Sigmund Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) and *Humour* (1927), Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651), Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (1970), as well as other relevant books in humor research like Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1955), and Erasmus' *Praise of the Folly* (1511). Evidently, he also owned a joke book containing thousands of Jewish jokes (Friedman 2013, 159). In his own works, Fromm comes closest to the philosophy of humor in his analysis of the paradoxical logic. He touches upon this idea in many of his books (e.g. Fromm 1956a/2000; 1960; 1962/2006; 1966a/1991) but only briefly in each. One can admit that his general thought in matter is not complete, but it is an interesting opening nevertheless.

Fromm writes that there is a fundamental difference between what he calls Western and Eastern thought. In Western thought, Aristotelian logic prevails, and Fromm believes that differences in logics have a great influence in how people relate to the world. Aristotelian logic is based on the law of identity ($A = A$), the law of contradiction ($A \neq \text{non-A}$) and the law of the excluded middle (A cannot be both A and not- A , or neither A nor not- A). These basic premises are self-evident in the Western world. If someone claims that X is at the same moment A and non- A , his claim is considered absurd. (Fromm 1956a/2000, 66.)

Humor, as understood in the light of incongruity theory, is in a certain way based on these logical rules. The connections between humor and paradoxes have been stated by a number of philosophers (e.g. Schopenhauer 1910; Kant 1790; Hutcheson 1750). Perhaps the clearest formulation is postulated by Søren Kierkegaard: "the comic always lies in a contradiction." (Kierkegaard 1846, 296). For an Aristotelian, the perceived incongruity has to be resolved

somehow. The paradox cannot stay as it is. We have to have a conceptual framework which guides our worldview and helps us to resolve paradoxes. One guiding principle is that something can be funny only when compared to something else. When there is an apparent contradiction between cultural categorizations, we react by laughing. We laugh because something has gone wrong, because there is a disjunction present between thoughts and perceptions.³¹ Even the perceived paradox has to make some sense, and this sense can be traced back to Aristotelian logic. This means that our perception is connected to our conceptualizations, and thus, to the surrounding social setting as discussed above. We think through concepts. Fromm highlights that these conceptualizations are manmade categories and not elements of the world (Fromm 1956a/2000, 69), which means that humorous paradoxes are necessarily social.

Aristotelian logic states that contradiction is not possible, and one can conclude anything from a paradox: if there is an X which is simultaneously both A and non-A, we are actually living in the world of humor, that is, of paradoxes. In this world, nothing can be certain or in any kind of order. I suggest that in a world containing nothing but paradoxes, humor also vanishes. There is no room for funniness because there is nothing to which one could compare the perceived oddity: because nothing actually is odd. Paradoxes are alive and unresolvable.

Fromm mentions how in Eastern thought, in contrast to Western, paradoxes are left alive. He calls this way of thinking paradoxical logic. According to him, this thinking is present in Chinese and Indian thought as well as in the philosophies of Heraclitus, Hegel and Marx. The central claim of the paradoxical logic is stated by Lao-tse: "Words that are strictly true seem to be paradoxical." (Fromm 1956a/2000, 66.) Fromm also refers to Freud's concept of ambivalence and states that it makes sense in paradoxical logic but not in Aristotelian logic. Fromm argues that in the Aristotelian framework it is absurd if someone claims that she loves and hates a certain person at the same moment "since it would be utterly nonsensical to have two contradictory feelings at the same time towards the same person." (Fromm 1960, 102.) Fromm is obviously wrong here. Aristotelian logic leaves room for clarifying concepts, and it is logically possible to understand described situation about hate and love. Logic allows one to hate and to love the same person at the same moment.

We have to understand, however, that Fromm's take on Aristotelian logic is actually milder than he claims. His focus is, after all, on certain kinds of cultural paradoxes. Logical paradox is a different argument, and this difference must be cleared up. Craig Callender and Ralph Edney (2012, 68-79) describe the difference between these two types of paradoxes in relation to the logical conditions of time travelling: Time travel allows the possibility, say, that I could be my own grandfather. This is not a logical paradox. A logical contradiction would state that I am and I am not my own grandfather.

³¹ This formulation is a simplification as there are some contradictions which are tragic to some and humorous to others. The discussion of the detailed technicalities of different kinds of contradictions is left aside for later research.

For example, the cartoon about the ever-going chase between Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner offers an illustration about a lighter paradox: the coyote runs off the cliff, but he stays in the air for a moment. When he realizes that he has stepped over, gravity starts to affect him and the coyote falls down. This is a paradox, as there *is* gravity and as there *is not* gravity. However, it is not a logical contradiction in the Aristotelian sense (P and non-P). To be a logical paradox, the gravity should both affect and not affect the coyote at the same moment. This is not the case in the cartoon. The humorous view, I agree, is paradoxical in our way of understanding natural physical law, but this is only a certain kind of cultural paradox, not logical.

One alternative way to interpret Fromm's take on paradoxical logic is that he does not actually talk about formal logic but instead his focus is on the logic of being, and this can be linked to Hegel's logic, which Paul Redding (2010) calls *transcendental logic*. This logic is a critical continuum of, for example, Kant's and Spinoza's thinking. It is not first and foremost interested in the formal correctness of certain conceptual formulations, but instead it is a type of ontology: "Thus it is not just about the concepts 'being,' 'nothing,' 'becoming' and so on, but about *being, nothing, becoming* and so on, *themselves*." Redding further presents that for Hegel the law of contradiction actually means that everything is contradictory. (Redding 2010.)³²

This Hegelian notion comes close to Fromm's way of understanding the world. For him, the world is a silly place and human beings in it odd creatures: "Human existence is an absurdity; it would be impossible to experience fully the dichotomy of human existence and to remain sane." (Fromm 1990, 77.) This is actually a statement about our categorizations and their limitations, as they are not perfect nor complete. If one aims to, say, force the world to fit under a purely clinical scientific view, the world loses something essential. The basic premise for Fromm is that life is about change and growth, it is a constant process. That does not mean that we cannot know anything about the world. However, a utopian project to know absolutely everything from the universe seems distant, if not impossible. I think Fromm has something like this in his mind when he refers to the Socratic ideal of knowledge: the highest step of thought about knowledge is to realize that which one does not know (Fromm 1956a/2000, 68). Fromm is critical, for instance, of behavioral psychology which focuses only measuring how people react in different situations without trying to understand the inner experiences of human beings. As Fromm points out, the same apparent behavior may have different motives, and Fromm's own example is of two fathers punishing their children. One is a sadist who wants to hurt and control his child, the other is loving and wants to encourage the child so his development is healthy. (Fromm 1973/1992, 66-67.) Fromm's point is that the clinical perspective of an outsider is not always the most sensible perspective to take. Fromm acknowledges that everyone has a unique life history, and upon a

³² We do not need to enter detailed discussion of different kinds of logics here. My concern is just to suggest a benevolent way to read Fromm's take on paradoxical logic and how to understand it in relation to humor research.

close scrutiny, there are no identical experiences, certainly not between two different individuals but not even within one individual (Fromm 1966a/1991, 19-20). In this, Fromm once again comes close to the central paradoxes of human life: we are all unique, and yet the same; we tend to act in similar ways but still our actions are different.

The differences between Aristotelian logic and paradoxical logic have drastic effects upon society in Fromm's work. Aristotelian logic, Fromm writes, has led to objective science and dogmas, as it aims at the right way of thinking. The paradoxical logic, in turn, aims at the right action.³³ Instead of clinical knowledge, experience and connection to the world is more important. In relation to this, Fromm refers to probably the most famous quotation from Marx: "The philosophers have interpreted the world in different ways - the task is to transform it." (Fromm 1956a/2000, 70-71.) I argue here that in his works, Fromm wants to combine these two: rational understanding with an impulse to act towards humanistic goals. Mere description would be, in the end, an unambitious goal. As he remarks: "Logical thought is not rational if it is merely logical and not guided by the concern for life, and by the inquiry into the total process of living in all its concreteness and with all its contradictions" (Fromm 1968/2010, 50).

Only a few authors have touched upon Fromm's idea of paradoxical logic in depth so far, although a slightly larger group mentions that paradoxes appear to be present in Fromm's life and works in general. For instance, Knapp remarks that certain paradoxes frame a picture of Fromm's own work and life: "he was a rationalist with strong faith; he held fervent socialist convictions despite his allegiance to Western capitalism, and combined orthodox psychoanalysis with highly unorthodox large-scale theorizing on human behavior" (Knapp 1989, 2). Friedman describes Fromm as a flawed man with varied visions and temperaments as he sometimes had a compulsion to control others but, on the other hand, also expressed the capacity to love and empathize (Friedman 2013, xxx, xxxv, 159). A human being, I would conclude.

As mentioned, life is paradoxical for Fromm. Every human being is an individual, and still the social setting has a tremendous influence on everyone. We are free but we are bound. We value life but are indifferent towards it. Peace is a global goal and still there are wars around the world. Even our everyday life is paradoxical. As Fromm points out in one of his lectures: "Consciously everyone wants fun and excitement. But underneath that, I think, there is a great deal of depression and boredom" (Fromm 1963b).

Even Fromm's humanism is based on a paradox. If one is to share deep human experiences, one has to realize that "I am one with All, and yet I am myself, a unique, separate, limited, mortal human being" (Fromm 1981, 3). Humor has the potential to articulate this experience. In laughter one shares the same experience with other laughers, at least to some extent. Humor is social, and when watching a funny show together, people form a crowd. They are joined in

³³ These are not necessarily historical facts *per se*, but a demonstration of two different ways to approach the world.

their amusement and in their laughter. And still, they all experience their mirth individually, as they all have their own personal ways to relate to humor.

1.4.1 Affirming Paradoxes

Dan Merkur correctly points out that Fromm's paradoxes are often more semantic, or even rhetoric, than substantive (Merkur 2010, 90). This is a solid point, but I stress that the substantive side of these contradictions is founded in a social sense. For Fromm, there are practical paradoxes everywhere and they are a fundamental part of human existence, semantic or not. For example, in orations, every speaker always remembers to mention the importance of humanity and taking care of the less-fortunate, but still our world is ridden with selfishness and profit gaining appears to be the leading motive for so many people. This is a clear paradox in a practical sense.

I believe Fromm's Jewish background is of importance when considering his take on paradoxes. Funk mentions that practically all of Fromm's teachers and ancestors came from a traditional Jewish Orthodox circle (Funk 1988, 1). Serafim Seppälä explains how in the central Rabbinic text, the *Talmud*, paradoxes prosper. In Jewish traditions, contradictions are not feared, but instead they inspire new questions and fresh ways of thinking. Seppälä emphasizes that this style of approach probably influenced Jewish tradition more than the actual contents of the Talmud. This had also an impact on Jewish humor: a joke has a logic but it is a different logic than what non-Jewish jokers might consider usual. This twist of logic opens a dialogue between funniness and thought, as an old dictum reminds: "Der mentsh tracht, un Got lacht" - that is, man thinks, God laughs. The message of this notion is that it is sensible to laugh every now and then because it might provoke thinking. (Seppälä 2012, 43, 77.) In relation to this, Ignacio Götz argues that paradoxes are not irrational nor anti-reason, but an important way to express unprovable truths (Götz 2002, 25). It is reasonable to assume that humorous paradoxes were present in some forms in Fromm's childhood. For example, Akeret recalls how Fromm once told the following story from his youth: "When I was a young man (...) I said to my uncle, 'What will become of me?' And my uncle instantly replied, 'You Erich? You will become an old Jew!'" (Akeret 2009, 101-102.) Annette Thomson (2009, 3) interprets that this story reflects Fromm's uncle's intention to smother his nephew's possible pride and ambition. In another context, Funk actually implies that the uncle was wrong as Fromm grew out of his Jewish heritage (Funk 1988, 7). Be that as it may, as a friend of frogs (see the opening of this introduction and dissecting jokes), I leave the anecdote as it is, and let the reader make her own interpretations.

It is important to notice that traditional Jewish humor appears to be different from modern day produced humor. In Jewish tradition, laughter is not the most important thing that can occur in relation to humor. Henry Spalding suggests that a typical rabbinic story does not primarily aim to cause laughter but instead to evoke a smile and provoke thinking. He describes how a genuine Jewish joke "expresses their ages-old yearning for a world in which justice,

mercy, understanding and equality will prevail – not only for themselves but for all people” (Spalding 2001, xv-xiv). Obviously, in this tradition humor is not separated from the sphere of so-called seriousness nor from humanistic values.

Fromm considers that the central values in Judaism, affirmation of love, justice, freedom, and truth, are to be considered as an entire value system (Fromm 1966a/1991, 180). I suggest that humor should also be understood as a part of this wide and complex system, which is not separate from so-called serious thinking. In my interpretation, emphasizing paradoxes means tearing down cultural illusions. A Frommian critique would state that because we are so obsessed with Aristotelian logic, we deny all other possibilities which do not fit in our worldview. With paradoxical logic, Fromm reminds us of the possibility that things can be other than they are, that there are real possibilities for profound social, economic and cultural change.

Of course, it is possible that I am a prisoner of Aristotelian logic and have not been able to escape from the shackles of conceptual thinking. Fromm actually remarks: “You do not understand a person unless you know that life is paradoxical, and therefore that you have to think paradoxically in order to understand it.” (Fromm 2009, 10.) As I read all the writings above, I think I still try to understand the world and others on a conceptual level. It just might be that this is not understanding in the sense Fromm means. “Our consciousness, our awareness, is greatly influenced by Aristotelian logic. It is very difficult to experience a reality which can be experienced only in paradoxical terms. (...) we have to live in the paradox, and we have to think in the paradox, if we want to understand life.” (Fromm 2009, 11.) What Fromm states is that there is room for contradictions in the world. My aim, then, is to locate so-called sensible paradoxes and humor in relation to them. To do this, we need the basic, in a sense paradoxical assumption: seriousness is a necessity to humor.

Fromm acknowledges that “the acceptance of any kind of paradox is never easy. The natural tendency is to tear apart the two conflicting sides of a paradox.” (Fromm 1966a/1991, 154.) This is a powerful thought which also challenges the incongruity theory mentioned in the first section of this introduction, or, takes a step ahead of it. Typically, with our laughter we make a statement of the perceived paradox, and we in a sense solve it. This kind of laughter postulates that we have an opinion of how things ought to be, and to this understanding we compare the ridiculous object.

What is the difference, then, between humor which resolves the paradox, and humor which accepts the paradox? We can apply here what Fromm writes about hope: “Hope without the expectation of its immediate fulfillment in the here and now deteriorates into a passive waiting; the desired goal is postponed into the remote future and loses all force. (...) When hope loses its immediacy, it tends to become alienated. (...) My faith is transferred to the idol: posterity.” (Fromm 1966a/1991, 154.) If in humor one resolves the paradox, I believe, one might actually be supporting a specific kind of superiority theory. The laughter is positioned in relation to something. In my understanding this is the rational way to consider humor, but in the previous passages there might also be a pro-

found criticism directed at prevailing theories of humor. If the paradox is alive, there is an inner experience which does not resolve anything or put anything in “the right order”. In this kind of experience of humor, laughter is an expression of a moment of absurdity, the totality of human life instead of certain value judgment. But even so, humor is still bound to universal humanism and to growth and life.

The position of ‘paradox of hope’ is one of ‘faith’, faith in the sense of certainty based on the inner experience of the goal, even though it has not yet been reached, and no proof exists that it ever will be. Such faith will never be possible in a spectator who ‘waits and sees’ what will happen. It is possible only for one who with all his energy is tensed toward the goal, and whose faith is not dependent on the fact that the ideal has appeared in the flesh. (Fromm 1966a/1991, 157.)

1.4.2 Paradoxes of Humor

The paradoxical nature of the world, human beings and life in general also has its impact on the nature of humor. Incongruity theory explains how humor is produced by paradoxes; that there is a contradiction in play at which we laugh to resolve. In the field of jokes, this contradiction typically occurs on the level of language. Now, *in a Frommian interpretation, I propose that humor in itself, as a phenomenon, is also paradoxical. Or to put it otherwise, humor is a dynamic concept.* As humor is part of humanity, it is also always growing and changing. Humor does not remain constant over time or place. For this reason, it is utterly hard to give fixed explanations about the nature of humor. The dynamic nature of humor has practical implications for the philosophy of humor.

As humor is understood as a dynamic concept, it helps us to understand the cultural humor phenomenon, and human beings as well. Every so often when, say, a journalist or an interviewer asks what humor is, or whether there are certain topics about which people should be restricted from joking, he is presumably chasing some kind of fixed answer. Traditional theories of humor give these kinds of answers. The superiority theory states that we laugh when we perceive others inferior to us, that is, we laugh at other people’s flaws and misconduct. The relief theory suggests that with humor we bypass different inner and outer blocks.

These formulations are plausible to a certain extent but the problem is that they give fixed answers to a problem that demands dynamic ones if they are to make any sense. If my Frommian interpretation holds, these answers cannot explain the nature of humor completely. The same goes for those thinkers who believe that humor is essentially critical (see Varol 2014; Mersal 2011), a tool for exclusion (see Powell 1988; Billig 2005a), that humor has a healing function (see Lewis 2006), or that humor is a game (see Gruner 2000). Naturally, others have noticed the same difficulty, and, for example, Giseline Kuipers argues that because of the underlying theoretical disagreements, one cannot answer the question of whether humor is essentially critical or conservative with empirical considerations (Kuipers 2008, 370). But the Frommian consideration takes a step

forward, as there is no need for this kind of fixed answer about the essence of humor.

Fromm, in a sense, has already presented a similar criticism as I do of “clinical humor research”. For example, Fromm points out that a smile is always a mystery, unless it is a learned behavioral pattern which aims at pleasing people (Fromm 1976, 111). It is, of course, possible to describe a person’s smile and calculate which facial muscles are used in smiling. Despite of these possibilities, smile is never just a smile, and it can signal various things. There is a difference, Fromm explains, between somebody smiling because he wants to hide his antagonism, and if a salesperson smiles, as he has been instructed to do, at a customer (Fromm 1973/1992, 62). “You are able to distinguish among hundreds of kinds of smiles, but the things they express can be worlds apart” (Fromm 1983/1986, 3). From this basis he criticizes, for example, a study of attitudes of mothers towards children. In the study, psychologists gathered data about, among others, how often a mother smiled at her child. According to Fromm, the “basic data is completely unscientific, because if you state, ‘Mother smiles’, you know nothing. It all depends on how she smiles. She can smile lovingly, bitterly, indifferently.” (Fromm 1991b/2010, 66.) In relation to this, the studies that count the amount of smiles, jokes, or laughs a person displays on some particular occasion typically fall short, as they make oversimplified hypotheses about the essence of humor and laughter. This, naturally, does not mean that they are not significant at all. Following Fromm, the demand, however, is that even clinical humor research has to be contextualized and the results have to be understood as occurring within a unique historical moment.

It is necessary to realize that Fromm is a systemic thinker: that is, he tries to understand the totality of human life. This kind of theorizing does not easily fit in with the contemporary ideals of reductionist and mechanistic paradigms which scientists so often use to define results in material terms. This kind of research lacks the possibility to evaluate, for instance, humor in the light of biophilic ethics or productive humanism. (cf. Maccoby 2014b, 15.) But Frommian humor research, I conclude, is not just the study of humor but, eventually, an attempt to understand humanity, contradictions being at the core of both. Consider how Fromm describes faith as a character trait: “(R)ational faith is a conviction which is rooted in one’s own experience of thought or feeling. Rational faith is not primarily belief in something, but the quality of certainty and firmness which our convictions have. Faith is a character trait pervading the whole personality, rather than a specific belief.” (Fromm 1956a/2000, 110.) I propose to consider humor in an analogous fashion. Thus, humor is not just about the wording of a joke but it is a part of human existence, as mentioned above: a way to relate to problems and a possibility for solutions. Humor, in this sense, is an attitude and a part of a worldview. If one wants to understand humor, the underlying basic motivations are crucial. My conclusion is that as humor is part of the total character structure, one cannot detach humor from, say, respect for life, or whatever the basic attitudes of a society or an individual are. Thus, humor

expresses a way to relate to others, and this relatedness takes many forms and manifestations, as discussed in article I.

As one can see, my position on humor is different to, say, the computational trends in humor research. For example, Alessandro Valitutti with his research group “propose[s] a method for automated generation of adult humor by lexical replacement and present empirical evaluation results on the obtained humor” (Valitutti & al 2013, 1). Basically, I argue that by doing this the research group uses ‘humor’ as a synonym for ‘joke’, and grossly simplifies the whole idea of humor. They do base their insights on the incongruity theory but in a way which does not appear to reflect the way people enjoy humor in our everyday level. Jokes, of course, are a form of humor but humor is a much wider concept. They do not adequately consider the social aspect of humor.

In relation to Fromm’s humanism and social criticism, *I propose that humor should be seen in relation to character structure*. According to Maccoby, Fromm thought that “(h)umor is the emotional side of reason, the emotional sense of reality” (Maccoby 1996, 84), or to put it other way, he believed that “the sense of humor was the emotional equivalent of a cognitive sense of reality” (Maccoby 2009, 143). I propose a more detailed take on the subject: besides the way in which one evaluates or enjoys the contents of jokes, a sense of humor also includes how one perceives the social situation as well as the desire either to dominate by ridiculing, or to criticize the current society with jokes, or to produce joy in laughter, or to bypass inner or outer obstacles with humor, or whatever other motivation for joking: all this is tied up with a person’s total character.

Some philosophers, such as Ronald de Sousa, suggest that if one is able to laugh at, say, a racist joke, one has to share the assumptions and attitudes on which the nasty joke is based (de Sousa 1987, 240). The implication is that if you laugh at a sexist joke, then you have to have malicious attitudes towards female gender. As Aaron Smuts (2010, 335-336) points out, if this was the case, laughter would be a great tool to assess characters; unfortunately, it is not. So, Smuts suggests, instead of engaging in character examination one should focus on analyzing the effects of humor.

Both of these thinkers miss, if you may, the Frommian goal. If (the sense of) humor is considered as a character trait, it does not mean merely interpreting just some particular jokes, but neither is it sufficient only to consider the effects of humor. Instead, in a Frommian spirit, one should try to understand why someone laughs at some occasion, why others tell the jokes they do, how they relate to the world with their humor, what does the humorous moment express, and so forth.³⁴ For example, in the ethics of humor, philosophers attempt to give some clear guidance for how and when to use humor. I am afraid one cannot sensibly give such an answer. Questions like, “when is it wrong to laugh?”, or

³⁴ This idea is based on Fromm’s stance on dreams: conventionally authors talk about *interpretation* of dreams, but Fromm emphasizes *understanding* of dreams, which goes deep to the personality and character: “I believe that such understanding is important for every person who wants to be in touch with himself” (Fromm 1951, vi).

“are there topics which are not allowed?”, lead to wrong paths. As humor is a dynamic concept, again, one cannot give fixed answers to these questions. Instead, the focus should be on how humor progresses or regresses the well-being of an individual and a society. If current humor practices aim to humiliate and oppress others, it portrays a worrying picture about that society. Humor has the potential to bring people together in the moment of shared laughter, but it also can be a tool for separation.

Let us have an example. If someone cracks a joke among his fellow philosophers, “Q: What do you call 100 philosophers on the bottom of the sea? A: A good start”, it does not necessarily mean that he is anti-philosopher. I claim that telling the previous kind of joke represents something quite different to someone telling, for example, this kind of joke: “Q: What is yellow and black and makes you laugh? A: A bus full of niggers going over a cliff.” I apologize for the offensive tone of the previous words. One cannot, however, fall entirely silent with these kinds of jokes if he is to analyze humor in a serious academic manner (cf. Billig 2005b).

The latter joke is obviously rude. Of course, the social situation is a crucial determinant when evaluating the possible racist attitude of the joke. On a technical level, both jokes are quite much the same; a particular group of people die, which is presented as funny. But the jokes are evidently also worlds apart. The cultural and historical contexts cannot be bypassed. Still, I do not believe that based only on certain jokes, one could make a comprehensive profile about the joker. The reason for this is simple: the mere words do not define the joke. If a joke is told by, say, a stand-up comedian in a club, and by a TV-host in a late night show, and by an academic in a small group of friends, it has always different dynamics and different meanings. This is one of the paradoxes of humor that should be approached from a Frommian position. For example, it is eventually pointless to try to, say, ban certain words and state that one cannot joke about this or that subject. Fromm, in a way, shares this idea. His point touches human desires, but I think it is applicable also to humor:

It seems to me, the problem is not to taboo and prohibit the satisfaction of desires, but to stimulate man in the cultivation in desires which are those of a developing, active, alive human being. Only by the cultivation of human desires can progress be made; it cannot arise through the regulation of the satisfaction of desires that already exist – that just doesn’t work. (Fromm 1966b, 121.)

If my understanding of humor as a dynamic part of a dynamic character is correct, then applying external limitations to humor appear to be futile. Embracing the humanistic ideals is the way to promote humane humor. Ideological preaching, however, is not the best way. As Fromm writes about the humanistic act of giving, in which an individual gives a part of oneself to another: “he gives him that of which is alive in him; he gives him of his joy, of his interest, of his understanding, of his knowledge, of his humor, of his sadness – of all expressions and manifestations of that which is alive in him.” (Fromm 1956a/2000, 22-23.) Humane humor, then, is not commercially produced or goal-oriented, nor does it aim at any objective, nor try to influence or force another human being into

something. Instead, it is sharing without selfish ambitions in a unique moment. This kind of humor does not need to be gathered or canned as there is no need to store jokes. A poetic formulation might state that humor occurs in a moment, and in this moment, there is a glimpse of eternity present.

As the human race and its societies have developed, so has humor. There is some connection between modern jokes and ancient funny remarks, but also clear differences between contemporary forms of humor and older ones (see Kivimäki & al, 2002). As humor is bound to humanity, it cannot go back but only forward (cf. Fromm 1956a/2000, 7-8). Humor has to grow and progress alongside all other human facets. This is the precise point which Fromm criticized about produced humor. Humor cannot be chained to certain formats. Here also is the dialectical element in the progress of humor: as something new is discovered, cultural industries try to repeat it as much as possible for the purposes of economic gains. The process is dialectical: the most daring humorists always have to push forward the boundaries of current humor, try to find new solutions, try to be funny and insightful in new ways. Many of the attempts are doomed to fail. But every once in a while, there is a new form of humor which succeeds in being funny in a novel way, which renews humor. Of course, just being funny is not enough as even the amusement has to be humane in Frommian terms. This is the double challenge for humorists – to be able to create new humor and to be humane. Many of us are not up to the task, and settle for repeating the old patterns in the name of laughter.

1.5 Humane Humor

The older I get and the more I read Fromm and academic humor research, the less I know about humor. Five years ago everything was simple and nice: a racist joke implied how the teller and the laugher are both racists. Nowadays, I cannot state that someone is racist because he laughs at something. I do not even know if a joke can be called racist.

Simon Weaver, who bases his research on Zygmunt Bauman's idea about liquid modernity, has come to similar conclusions. He points out that humor can produce both racist and non-racist meaning simultaneously (Weaver 2011, 190). However, Weaver understands humor as a form of rhetoric in the line of linguistic theories, and focuses solely on racist humor. This is an understandable choice, but my Frommian standpoint takes a step or two further from Weaver's work. First, Weaver's conclusion is that humor has many kinds of effects because modernity is liquid; he does not claim that humor itself could be liquid. Another difference is in my emphasis of humor's relation to character. In any case, the problem we both underline is that things are not as simple as one could hope for. On this, Fromm states: "Of all one must doubt" (Fromm 1962/2006, 9).

When one keeps in mind what lies at the heart of humanity (contradiction) and the existential problems, and understands (the sense of) humor as a charac-

ter trait, it is possible to formulate a critical position in humor research. From this combination it can be argued that humor is a dynamic concept as was explained above. Therefore, if someone tries to give fixed answers about questions pertaining to humor, one should be very doubtful with the given results. It is impossible to state that humor is always critical, or that humor is conservative. It can be both. In a similar manner, it is not easy to give patterns to how to produce funniness even though computational humor research aims to prove otherwise, as previously mentioned.

Simon Critchley (2004, 2) remarks that “humour is nicely impossible object for a philosopher” (and therefore an irresistible field of study), and Aaron Smuts (2010, 345) claims that humor is “a phenomenon that admits of few generalizations”. Laura Little (2008, 7) refers to “the impossibility of identifying a precise or all-encompassing definition” of humor, and Arthur Asa Berger (1995, 3) remarks how “humor continues to confound us. We’ve never figured out how to deal with it”. Tad Friend makes a conclusive point about the difficulty of humor research: “Seeking a thoroughgoing explanation for humor is like seeking the Fountain of Youth, or the Philosopher’s Stone — it is a quest not for a tangible goal but for a beguiling idea.” (Friend 2002.) As I argue, humor is so difficult to define and its nature so hard to grasp because, from a Frommian perspective, humor does not have a fixed essence, but instead is a part of everyone’s dynamic character.

As humor is a dynamic phenomenon, it is hard to see any aspect of it that applies universally. The contents of humor and the effects of jokes change as people and societies change. There is a clear difference how young children and adults enjoy humor (see Bergen 1998 about the development of sense of humor), but still these experiences appear to have a common root. They are different and yet the same. To put it in Fromm’s words: “there is permanence and change in any concept reflecting the experience of a living man” (Fromm 1966a/1991, 18). These kinds of concepts are alive, but Fromm reminds us how conceptualizations can easily become ideological: “If the concept (...) is separated from the experience to which it refers (...) it loses its reality and is transformed into an artifact of man’s mind. (...) (T)he idea expressing an experience has been transformed into an ideology that usurps the place of the underlying reality within the living human being.” (Fromm, 1966a/1991, 18.) This is Fromm’s sharp criticism of clinical humor research.

Humor, in terms of cultural contradictions, does not remain the same over time. It transforms as society develops. And, even if two people laugh at the same humorous sight, the same comedy, their experiences are not exactly the same. People laugh together but are still separate in that moment. Humor is a jolly reminder of how we can only know fragments of reality at any given time due to our singular perspectives, and our striving to systematize reality *as a whole* is eventually ridiculous. In this light, it is extraordinarily hard to try to capture the concept of humor in a closed system. Fromm’s challenge for humor research is to find a way to let the experience and the concept be alive, as humor by its nature changes throughout history.

Despite the changing nature of humor, there is also continuity in it. Humor is always bound to the existential needs of human beings, to human nature. Even in comedies, one cannot – or should not – get rid of humanistic ideals. Humor has an intimate connection to worldviews and values. That does not, obviously, mean that one's humor is same as one's values. For example, one can laugh at gallows humor even if she has a humanistic stand on life. If I laugh at, say, a joke in which there are humans, it does not mean that I am against humans. Fromm's insight about the nature of words fits well with interpreting humor: "Words have to be seen together with the deeds and with the total personality of him who utters them. Words have meaning only in the total context of deed and character." (Fromm 1962/2006, 122.)

Even the most obvious humanistic claims about humor are arguable. If a theory states that humor is, say, always a positive force, or the last refuge of freedom, it actually freezes humor, and turns humor to an idol in Frommian terms: that is, something that is not alive. If humor is said to be this or that, those claims tend to alienate, or at least separate, people from humor. These kinds of theorizations easily turn into ideologies. In this sense, critical humor research is of great importance. Fromm argues that one of the possible disasters of human life is to be caught in a stereotypical way of thinking (Fromm 1962/2006, 138). We tend to have these kinds of ideological "truths" about humor and laughter. Breaking these chains of illusions is what matters, and this is at the core of critical humor research. To keep humor alive, it has to be understood as a dynamic concept. As truth is historical, we should be very careful before stating universal truths about humor. But as the truth is historical, we can know something about humor in this precise cultural and historical situation. This has to be the starting point of humor research. The passion to state that humor is X, as well as the counter position that we cannot state anything about humor, are both wrong. If humor is understood as a dynamic conception in relation to the dynamic character then it is possible to interpret humor as a social phenomenon in this precise moment. We can attain information about humor despite the temporal nature of this information. That is why also empirical, or "clinical", studies about humor are important. They are studies about the current society. The universal and over-historical conclusions are, however, typically flawed. The implications based on certain calculations are typically ideological (humor is good, humor is bad, humor is healthy, humor is suppressing, and so forth). My formulation about Frommian humor research opens up the possibility to interpret humor as a social phenomenon in a certain historical period, and even though truth is historical, one can achieve scientific results about humor despite the described temporality. Humor, in any case, has some features in certain periods of time as humor is bound to surrounding culture.

There are certain practical implications if one understands humor as a dynamic concept. For example, it is pointless to defend oneself after some stupid outburst by stating "It was only a joke!" This kind of defense states that humor, or joking, belongs to the sphere of non-serious, and the message is that there cannot be any serious consequences with joking. This kind of statement, once

again, freezes humor to something dead. So, instead of approving the joke-argument, one should be ever more critical: Why did he joke? What did he express with his humor? Did he try to achieve something by joking? All in all, humor cannot be excluded from the so-called real, or serious, life. Those who try to, say, defend freedom of speech with respect to joking have to accept the serious consequences of their positions as well. If joking cannot or does not have any serious effects on people or society, then it cannot defend freedom of speech either (see Hietalahti & al, forthcoming 2016).³⁵

The dynamic nature of humor is a challenge if one aims to can or package funniness. I do not take the position that in fact there is no humor, or that humor has nothing to do with funniness, in the same way that Fromm implies that the logical step of a religion is to come to the conclusion that there is no God (Fromm 1966a/1991, 53). In a certain way, the British comedy group Monty Python and their television show *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1969-1974) came quite close to this conclusion; their genius was in showing that a comedy sketch does not need a punchline, and how even the most serious matters can be presented in a funny way. Naturally, getting rid of punchlines is not same as stating that there is no humor, but they made a significant effort to challenge the limits of humor and the way we understand silliness.

Humor, as a part of living human beings, is always in the process of growth and it cannot remain stagnant. I think that for this reason, John Cleese, a member of Monty Python, has been an exceptional figure in the field of entertainment. He has constantly been looking for new humor and funniness and always tried to avoid repeating patterns (see Cleese 2014, 181-182; Chapman & al 2014, 332). But we cannot idolize Cleese either; one cannot state that, for instance, *The Ministry of Silly Walks* is a perfect example of how one ought to produce humor. The danger is that if one calls, say, John Cleese the messiah of humor, it might distort Cleesean humor as, say, Stalin distorted Marxism and remade it into Stalinism. Instead of sticking to the content of humor, one should observe how Cleese challenges the traditional ways of creating fun and joy.

One claim in humane humor, I suggest, is that a personal taste of what one considers funny is, eventually, of little worth. But can one leave her own sense of humor aside? I think it is possible, although, probably not that common. As a personal example, I do not think that Woody Allen is very funny. Rather, I consider most of his movies quite boring. Nevertheless, I do value Allen as a humorist, and I understand that there is a wide audience for his works. I also believe that Allen has quite humanistic aspects of his humor, even though his humor does not come across as funny to me with my personal taste.

1.5.1 The Possibility of Humane Humor

It may be counterintuitive, but humanism does have room for humor and even for biting humor. As Götz reminds us, a value system which leaves humor out can be considered “dangerously morbid and grudging” (Götz 2002, 111). Of

³⁵ I thank Dr. Onni Hirvonen for this insight.

course, it is possible that Fromm would not agree with all of my interpretations about humor, as he does make some fixed claims about humor. For example, when he makes a list of positive and negative aspects of different character orientations, he claims that the positive aspect of marketing orientation is “witty”, and the negative is “silly” (Fromm 1947/2003, 86). I do not believe that one can state that silliness is inherently negative in relation to what Fromm calls productiveness. Especially so, as Fromm does not clarify what he means by witty and silly.

Also, Fromm does not appear to be sympathetic to humiliating humor. He, for instance, refers to Talmud which states: “He who makes his neighbor ashamed in the presence of others is as if he had shed his blood.” (Fromm, 1966a/1991, 192.) This quotation suggests that ridiculing others, mocking people, harsh jokes, and such, are not what Fromm might consider humane humor. I think Fromm could agree with Emily Toth, who has formulated the first rule of humane humor according to which one should never “make fun of what people cannot change, such as social handicaps, race, sex, or physical appearance” (Toth 1981, 783). These kinds of claims aim, generally, to the good and they can be called caring. It is possible to carry on this line formulating other rules, like, “Joke about your own gender or ethnic group, but no other”, or, “do not mock other’s sufferings”, or, “there has to be temporal and psychological distance before making fun of a tragedy”. But, I suggest, these do not actually fit with Fromm’s basic claims: humanity, and humor alongside it, is always changing. For this reason, it is hard to give previous kinds of fixed rules for humor. I believe that there can be truly humanistic humor that might offend someone, and target certain qualities which appear to be quite unchangeable. Also, the most brilliant humorists are able to handle even “forbidden topics” in a humane manner.

It is possible, however, to make another interpretation about Fromm’s stance on the ethics of humor. Fromm was an extremely demanding psychoanalyst who did not particularly care to please his patients. Instead, Fromm led the patient to face difficult and painful truths. According to Fromm, change is never easy, and it takes a hard effort and commitment. Sentimentalism has to be left aside. (e.g. Fromm 2009.) From his psychoanalytical work, one can conclude that Fromm was not afraid of shocking or disturbing if he thought that this disturbance might lead to a change for the better. His fearless analytical style suggests that Fromm could support shocking and disturbing humor if he saw the positive delayed benefits behind the possible immediate pain. This leads to a thought that offensive humor can actually be *cathartic*, and it can challenge one to think why she considered, say, a joke offensive.³⁶ This does not mean that offensive humor is always good. Being shocking in itself is not enough. Humor might shock, but shock cannot be the ultimate root or goal of funniness. This is why so many contemporary humor series are not as praiseworthy as they could

³⁶ Friedman has found evidence that in his personal relationships Fromm was capable of mockery, as he evidently once remarked: “Having a child is nothing; even a cow can do it.” (Friedman 2013, 22.)

be. Laughing at everything, shocking, disturbing and rattling the cage of moral limits cannot be the final goal of humor. I have argued elsewhere (Hietalahti 2014) how challenging boundaries of, say, morality and good taste always leads to new boundaries. Eventually, humor has to be based on something.

In his lectures, Fromm affirms how much he enjoyed Charlie Chaplin movies like *Limelight* (1952) and *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947). Fromm especially praises *The Great Dictator* (1940) which “ended with one of the most moving speeches I have ever heard” (Fromm 1991b/2010, 56). He is impressed that in Chaplin’s movies one can find expressions of loving relatedness to another person and love for humanity “to an exceptional degree” (Fromm 1991b/2010, 67). These lines suggest that Fromm saw behind the superficial aspects of comedies as, for instance, in *Dictator* there are scenes where people are shot and these killings are presented in a humorous manner. My interpretation is that Chaplin’s movies, and especially the character ‘Tramp’, are certain kind of manifestations of Fromm’s ethical principle of how everyone carries all of humanity within herself. The Tramp appears to be in a one scene both, to use Fromm’s phrases, a saint and a criminal, a thief and a benefactor. He can be a gentleman but can also steal candy from a baby, and kick a woman in the buttocks if the situation so dictates. But then again, if he stumbles on a spittoon, he might apologize to the poor thing.

Fromm, obviously, had his own sense of humor. Contemporaries remember Fromm as a humorous man who knew a tremendous amount of jokes (see beginning of this introduction). Many of them express that Fromm used humor to, say, emphasize a point or to ease the tension between an analyst and a patient. Apparently humor was one of his central personality traits. Perhaps some writers propose, in between the lines, that Fromm’s humor made him more humane. None of them, however, explicitly state why they highlight this humorous side of Fromm. My worry, based on the recollections, is that they emphasize the instrumental side of humor and how Fromm used humor. Of course, the contemporaries probably have not studied the philosophy of humor in depth nor reflected their thought in relation to this. It might be just a typical way to express certain ideas and perceptions about what is considered to be a part of warm humanity. In any case, many of the contemporaries at least hint at the possibility that Fromm used humor as a tool.

If the contemporaries are correct, then Fromm in fact violates what I call Frommian, or humanistic, humor. That is, humor is not a means to any end, but an expression of human situation. One should not use humor instrumentally, or try to achieve a goal with humor. For me, *humor is what Fromm calls a form of being, not having* (Fromm 1976). The clues shared by Fromm’s contemporaries suggest that in their interpretation Fromm related to humor in a having mode. In this, humor can be a tool for manipulation, though the aim might be good (relaxing, making a point, clarifying ideas etc.). Naturally, this does not prove anything conclusive about Fromm’s own personality or character. As I have repeatedly stated, this dissertation is not a study about Fromm’s own sense of

humor but an interpretation of a cultural phenomenon in relation to his social philosophical and psychological insights.

The ideal of humane humor can be explicated by comparing *the modes of having and being*. They describe two alternative ways to relate to reality. In the having mode, all that matters is property, and the guiding principle is that almost anything can be owned. This includes, besides material things, ideas and qualities, personal relationships, and so forth. In this mode, well-being and happiness are achieved by possessing as much as possible. (Fromm 1976.) Humor, I add, is one object of possible property in this mode. Be it an analytical study, concocting a joke, or possessing a sense of humor, everything is considered as property.

In the being mode, in opposition, the central aspect is to “renew oneself, to grow, to flow out, to love, to transcend the prison of one’s isolated ego” (Fromm 1976, 111). In this mode, humor is not something to be captured by words, and this holds for both analytical studies and humorous experiences. Fromm explains: “In the structure of having, the dead word rules; in the structure of being, the alive and inexpressible experience rules” (Fromm 1976, 112). Humane humor, as has been said, is an immediate expression of relatedness. A sense of humor is not something that one has, but instead a phenomenon that refers to a propensity in relation to humor. I think Fromm could make the distinction of the differences between these two modes with these statements: “She has a great sense of humor”, and, “she is wonderfully hilarious”.³⁷

Fromm mentions in one of his unpublished texts that in the having mode words and concepts are understood in a fixed sense, but in the mode of being, they have a more relative meaning. Fromm suggests that one has to try to understand the expression behind words, and “(t)he failure to grasp the relative meaning of words, concepts and thoughts results in the words becoming ossified or dead” (Fromm 2012, 1). This dynamic aspect opens up the possibility for great artists, and also for the greatest humorists, to express new insights even though the used concepts are bound to time and culture: “The words are the old ones, the essence is new” (Fromm 2012, 6).

I suggest that humane humor, in the light of Fromm’s premises, is not canned or packaged. Instead, it rejoices in the moment, spontaneously. In this “being type of humor” it is not necessary to be a great joke teller. Instead, humorous sights and spontaneities take a central role. It is immediate and unselfish. Humor happens in a moment, and disappears just as quickly. This combination of funniness and joy is hard to store for later usage (or retelling) as it can never be fully repeated. Still, it leaves its mark and has an impact on everyone who experiences it. This kind of humor does not have to be anything grand. What Fromm writes about tenderness can be paraphrased to describe humane humor: it is not “self-propelling, it has no aim, it has no end. Its satisfaction is the very act itself, in the joy of being friendly, of being warm, or considering and respecting another person” (see Fromm 1994/1997, 129). An example: two

³⁷ The common greeting “Have fun!” is, I believe, against all of Fromm’s ideals (see Article III for the critique of fun).

philosophers are happily discussing something as they walk down a hallway. In the corridor, there is a sofa, and room only for one at a time to bypass the obstacle. Normally, the other would wait the first one to walk by the sofa. But instead, they both keep walking: the other just walks over the sofa, in the moment. This is a moment of shared humor which does not aim at anything. It is an expression of a number of things and still not a political or ideological claim *for* anything. It strips down formal manners without offending anyone. This does not, however, mean that everyone should start climbing over sofas to produce humane humor. What Fromm writes about life, holds also for humor: "I think nothing in life is repeated, only mechanical things can be repeated" (Fromm 1991a/1998, 56).

This ideal of humane humor is, I believe, the guiding idea in Frommian humor studies. As his research clearly point out, humor cannot be separated from the social and historical context. Humanity, and humor within it, is a dynamic concept, although not relativistic (in a sense "anything goes!"). The connection between humanistic thinking and humor is vital: humor is not outside humanistic thinking, and even humanistic thinking has room for humor. Humanistic humor does not mean that one could not consider some immoral story funny. Humor always surprises us to some extent, and sometimes we find ourselves laughing at others' misfortunes perhaps without even realizing what we are laughing at. The demands of humanism should not be taken as a burden which restricts the individual freedom to joke and laugh. Instead, as Fromm himself interprets the Jewish law collection *halakhah*, it points to a meaningful way of living (Fromm 1966a/1991, 192). Certain fixed claims about what can and cannot be laughed at are, eventually, narrow and do not reach the essence of humane humor. I believe that humane humor is not a technical, measurable quality. What Fromm writes about brotherly love or love for neighbor and stranger, is applicable also to humor. This form of love "is based on the experience that we are all one. The differences in talents, intelligence, knowledge are negligible in comparison with the identity of the human core common to all men. (...) If I perceive in another person mainly the surface, I perceive mainly the differences, that which separates us." (Fromm 1956a/2000, 43.)

In his humanism, Fromm is a progressive thinker. He does not settle just for describing the world but also wants to change it for the better, into a more humane place to live. He has deep rational faith in humanity, and though the odds might not be on his side, Fromm makes a suggestion for the character structure of "The New Man" and for "The New Society" (1976, 206-250). In my articles I refer to humanistic humor, and in this introduction I have made some preliminary proposals how humor could be seen in light of the ideal of the new man. That is what I call humane humor, and the starting point is that one has to be willing to give up of the mode of having, and to progress towards the mode of being. I suggest that in this, humor is not used as a means to an end but it is conceived of as a way to relate to and understand the surrounding world. These remarks are essential to understand the following articles of this dissertation. But before proceeding to those, let me end this introduction with a quotation

from Fromm's childhood. Be it mockery or not, already his classmates saw young Erich's warm spirit:

"Mach mich wie den Erich Fromm / Dass ich in den Himmel komm"
 "Let me be like Erich Fromm / That I may to heaven come"
 (Knapp 1989, 14.)

1.6 Overview of the Articles

In addition to this introduction, this dissertation contains four individual articles, which all examine the social philosophy of humor. The first article (*The relevance of "social character" to humor studies*) focuses on Fromm's concept of social character and its significance for humor research. The second article (*Laughing at Oneself: On the New Social Character*) continues in the same vein, but discusses humor and the social character focusing on the phenomenon of laughing at oneself. The third article (*Huumorin kahlittu vapaus*) carries on the critical outline as it discusses the relationship between humor and freedom. The fourth article is the most "empirical", almost a case study, as it focuses on the competitive spirit of contemporary humor (*Kilpailun läpäisemä huumori*).

Article I sets the tone for other articles of the dissertation. In the text, I argue that humor should be seen in relation to what Fromm calls social character. A sense of humor is not only an individual capacity but a socially constructed feature. The article opens up in detail Fromm's concept of the social character and its connections to existing humor research. Social character, for instance, helps us to understand why and how humor can function both as a conservative and a critical social force. As humor is always bound to time and place, it does not have universal functions. In relation to this, I continue to argue that humor should be understood as part of a worldview and an expression of one's situation in the world.

My position is critical of a current trend of what I call clinical humor research. In this field, the aim is to measure how laughter can, say, prolong life, help to form relationships, or improve memory. My claim is that even if humor has different kinds of effects, humor should not be understood as a tool for anything. More important than measuring jokes and laughter is to understand humor as a reflection of its time. I suggest that the concept of social character is of central importance if one wants to understand humor in a profound manner. This concept opens up new possibilities to analyze reactions to humor, and how and why people are so passionate about humor in the modern world.

Article II carries on with the theme of social character but here the focus is on the contemporary phenomenon of laughing at oneself. I question the common public and academic opinion which states that self-ridicule is the morally highest form of humor. Using Fromm's and Maccoby's ideas about social character, I offer an alternative way to understand the tendency to laugh at oneself. Even though, for instance, humorists, critics and philosophers tend to empha-

size the moral high ground of the trait, I link it to the socio-cultural sphere and claim that there are questionable ways to laugh at oneself.

With article III, I propose a new perspective on the cultural tendency to understand humor as a last base of freedom. Typically the claim is that to be free, humor cannot have any external restrictions. I challenge this view with Fromm's idea about the two-fold nature of freedom: Freedom as a lack of external limitations (negative freedom) is not a sufficient condition for human freedom. Instead, we must be free to be humans (positive freedom). I argue that this view has a significant impact on, for instance, how freedom of speech should be understood. Freedom of speech by itself should not be the ultimate goal of humane societies, but instead, it has to be related to other types of and perspectives on freedom and self-realization. Therefore the claim that we have to be free to mock everything all the time is unconvincing.

Fromm's critical position encourages one to see beyond jokes and smiles, and the idea is to try to achieve how humor is related to humanity. In this respect, Fromm's work underlines an important difference between fun/pleasure and joy. Joy is part of the productive way in which to relate to the world. Fun, however, is a certain kind of peak experience, which often appears to be just a hollow way to escape from oneself. Fromm's claim, even in relation to humor, is that one has to be free *within oneself*. I conclude from this that we have to be free to evaluate our own sense of humor and our laughter. We have to be free to take humor seriously.

In article IV, I focus on the competitive spirit of humor. This article is based on an apparent paradox: if a sense of humor is considered as a part of a worldview or a basic attitude, how can one pit different senses of humor against one another without the whole venture being absurd? Put another way; how can one state that Q and non-Q is funnier than P and non-P? Obviously, a number of humor products aim to prove that this can be done as there are numerous humor competitions around the globe. The article interrogates this idea, and opens up hidden assumptions. Humor competitions measure popularity first of all, and via popularity the claim of "the most funny person/joke/comedian" is made. There are some philosophers who think that humor is by its nature competitive, but it is easy to argue against these kinds of theoretical claims once the underlying assumptions are made clear. However, from a humanistic perspective it is concerning how popular and natural these competitions appear to be.

Also, this article systematically challenges the commonly shared idea that laughter is the highest goal of humor. However, the possible conceptual hollowness of competitive humor does not mean that different kinds of humor competitions are meaningless. Instead, they are reflections of their time, of their society, and eventually, images of ourselves. Their popularity urges one to study humor empirically and ever more deeply. Just measuring different kinds of humor competitions is clearly of limited value but one should strive for a more profound, and, I argue, Frommian, style of empirical research. This kind of research combines psychological, sociological, and philosophical insights to

understand the social, cultural, ideological, economic and political factors related to contemporary humor research. So, this article is an attempt to locate the kind of topics in relation to humor that should be given deeper analysis. In this sense, it rounds up the themes of this dissertation.

YHTEENVETO (FINNISH SUMMARY)

Tutkimukseni käsittelee huumorin filosofiaa Erich Frommin humanistisen ja yhteiskuntakriittisen ajattelun valossa. Esitän, että huumori on dynaaminen käsite. Työni tärkein tavoite on muotoilla kriittinen näkökulma huumoriin, ja samalla luoda avaus humanin huumorin mahdollisuudesta. Vaikka huumori näyttäisi olevan universaali inhimillinen ilmiö, Frommia seuraten argumentoin, että huumori muuttuu ajassa ja paikassa, minkä vuoksi siitä on vaikea muotoilla pitäviä universaaleja väittämiä. Fromm painottaakin, että totuus on historiallinen, ja tätä ohjenuoraa seuraten esitän, että myös huumorin sisällöt ja merkitykset on tulkittava suhteessa vallitsevaan ainutlaatuiseseen historialliseen kontekstiin.

Kyseenalaistan yleisen uskomuksen, jonka mukaan nauru on aina hyvää ja huumori positiivinen asia. Näillä kummallakin on moninaisia – niin myönteisiä kuin kielteisiäkin – vaikutuksia, mutta jotta huumorin merkitystä voisi ymmärtää, sitä on tutkittava suhteessa yleisempään ihmisyyden ideaan. Näin ollen yhteiskuntakriittinen tutkimukseni on myös filosofista antropologiaa. Väitöskirjassani en tyydy pelkkään negatiiviseen kritiikkiin vaan Frommin radikaali-humanistisen ajattelun mukaisesti pyrin esittämään, kuinka huumori voi olla mahdollisista haittavaikutuksistaan huolimatta myös elämänmyönteistä. Näin ollakseen sen on oltava kytköksissä inhimillisen kasvuun ja edistykseen. Väitän, että hauskuus saa merkityksensä, kun ymmärrämme mihin arvoihin ilonpito pohjautuu ja millaista ihmisenä olemisen tapaa se edistää. Tässä suhteessa tutkimusprosessini on dialektinen: huumorintutkimus auttaa ymmärtämään ihmisyyttä, mutta samalla ihmisyyden perustojen avaaminen auttaa ymmärtämään huumoria.

Ensimmäinen artikkelini porautuu Erich Frommin yhteiskuntaluonteen käsitteeseen ja sen merkitykseen huumorintutkimukselle. Käsitteellä Fromm viittaa yksilön ja yhteisön väliseen suhteeseen, ja siihen kuinka yksilön luonne kehittyy aina väistämättä yhteisössä suhteellisen yhteneväisellä tavalla muiden kanssa. Tätä ideaa seuraten esitän, että huumorintaju ei ole ainoastaan yksilöllinen taipumus vaan yhteiskunnallisissa olosuhteissa määrittyvä piirre. Artikkelini avaa yhteiskuntaluonteen käsitteen suhdetta niin klassiseen kuin nykyaikaiseenkin huumorintutkimukseen, ja tarjoaa avauksia sen suhteen, kuinka nykyisiä huumorintutkimuksen suuntia voidaan edelleen kehittää Frommin teoreettisen viitekehyksen avulla. Yhteiskuntaluonteen käsite auttaa ymmärtämään huumorin dynaamista luonnetta; se selventää, kuinka huumori voi olla yhtäältä rakentava mutta toisaalta tuhoava voima, kuinka se voi olla kriittistä ja konservatiivista.

Toinen artikkelini jatkaa ensimmäisen artikkelin teemaa, ja tutkimus kohdistuu erityisesti itselle nauramisen ilmiöön. Frommin ja Michael Maccoby'n teoreettista viitekehystä seuraten esitän, että itselle nauraminen on sidoksissa vallitseviin arvoihin, eikä se suinkaan ole huumorin korkein muoto, vaikka moni tutkija ja humoristi niin väittääkin. Osoitan, että on olemassa myös kyseenalaisia tapoja nauraa itselle. Itselle nauraminen voi esimerkiksi kieliä vä-

lineellisestä halusta markkinoida ja myydä itseään, mutta toisaalta joissakin tapauksissa se voi liittyä riemulliseen oivallukseen siitä, kuinka rajoittuneita käsityksemme maailmasta, itsestämme ja muista ihmisistä ovatkaan. Itselle nauramisessa piilee potentiaalisesti vapauttava elementti, mutta toisaalta kulttuurinen vaatimus itselle nauramisesta voi viitata myös laajempaan yhteiskunnalliseen patologiaan.

Kolmas artikkelini tarkastelee huumorin ja vapauden suhdetta. Toisin kuin yleisesti väitetään, huumori ei ole vapauden viimeinen linnake. Frommia seuraten esitän, että pelkkä vapaus ulkoisista rajoituksista ei riitä vaan vapaus määrittyy ihmisyyden puitteissa. Tällä näkemyksellä on merkittävä vaikutus esimerkiksi siihen, kuinka sananvapauden luonne tulisi ymmärtää. Vaikka sananvapaus on arvokas yhteisöllinen saavutus, se yksinään ei voi olla ihmismyönteisen yhteisön päämäärä. Sananvapauteen vetoamalla on turha puolustaa törkeyksiä, joita yksilöt vitsikkyuden verholla laukovat toisilleen. Pikemminkin huumorin äärellä vapaus linkittyy siihen, että meillä on vapaus arvioida omaa suhdettamme huumoriin ja sitä, millaisia suhteita toisiin ihmisiin huumori rakentaa. Argumentoin, että on epäuskottavaa vaatia, että meillä tulisi olla vapaus pilkata kaikkea mahdollista kaiken aikaa.

Neljäs artikkelini keskittyy huumorin kilpailulliseen elementtiin. Teksti perustuu ilmeiselle paradoksille: jos huumorintaju on osa maailmankatsomusta, kuinka erilaiset maailmankatsomukset voidaan asemoida paremmuusjärjestykseen? Tai jos huumorissa on kyse ristiriidasta, kuinka voidaan väittää, että P ja ei-P on hausempi kuin Q ja ei-Q? Lukuisat huumorikilpailut kuitenkin perustuvat ajatukselle, että huumoria voidaan arvioida paremmuuden pohjalta. Artikkelini avaa näiden kilpailujen taustalla olevia julkilausumattomia oletuksia, ja esitän, että huumorikilpailuissa on kyse ennen kaikkea suosion mittaamisesta. Toki on filosofeja, joiden mukaan huumorissa on kyse aina kilpailusta, mutta tämä teoreettinen kanta on helppo kumota. Teoreettisesta heikkoudesta huolimatta varsinaiset huumorikilpailut ovat todellinen ilmiö, ja humanistisesta näkökulmasta on huolestuttavaa, kuinka suosittuja ja luonnollisia nämä kilpailut näyttävät olevan. Ne ovat ajankuvia tiettyinä historiallisena hetkenä, ja sitä myöten ilmauksia vallitsevasta ihmisenä olemisen tavasta.

Kokonaisuudessaan väitöskirjani on filosofinen tutkielma. Sen sijaan, että työ keskittyisi tarjoamaan konkreettisia empiirisiä tutkimusasetelmia ja -tuloksia, tutkimukseni tavoitteena on ymmärtää huumorin luonnetta filosofisesta näkökulmasta. Samalla tutkimukseni on kuitenkin empiirisesti motivoitunutta filosofista analyysia, jonka innoittajana on elävä ilmiö, huumori. Työ tarjoaakin näkökulman ihmisyyden ja huumorin suhteeseen. Paitsi että väitöskirjani tarjoaa filosofisen selvityksen huumorin käsitteestä, se pyrkii myös muotoilemaan käsityksen omasta yhteiskunnastamme vallitsevien huumorikäsitteiden valossa.

REFERENCES

- Akeret, R. 2009. "What Have You Learned about Yourself from Your Patient?" In R. Funk (ed.) *The Clinical Erich Fromm. Personal Accounts and Papers on Therapeutic Technique*. Rodopi, Amsterdam/New York. 101-104.
- Anderson, K. & Quinney, R. (eds.) 2000. *Beyond the Punitive Society*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Aristotle, 1970. *The Ethics of Aristotle: the Nichomachean Ethics Translated*. Trans. J. A. K. Thomson. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Attardo, S. 2008. "A primer for the linguistics of humor". In V. Raskin (ed.) *The Primer of Humor Research*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. 101-156.
- Attardo, S. & Raskin, V. 1991. "Script theory revis(it)ed: Joke similarity and joke representation model." In *HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research*. Vol. 4, No. 3/4, 293-347.
- Barber, B. 1992. "Jihad vs. McWorld." In *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1992/03/jihad-vs-mcworld/303882/> Accessed 19.6.2015.
- Bassist, E. 2012. "Why Daniel Tosh's 'Rape Joke' at the Laugh Factory Wasn't Funny." In *The Daily Beast* 11 July 2012. Retrieved from: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/07/11/why-daniel-tosh-s-rape-joke-at-the-laugh-factory-wasn-t-funny.html> Accessed 21.6.2015.
- Bergen, D. 1998. "Development of the sense of humor." In W. Ruch (ed.) *The Sense of Humor: Explorations of a Personality Characteristic*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. 329-358.
- Berger, A. A. 1995. *Blind Men and Elephants. Perspective on Humor*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Betz, B. R. 1974. *An Analysis of the Prophetic Character of the Dialectical Rhetoric of Erich Fromm*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University.
- Bierhoff, B. 1993. *Erich Fromm. Analytische Socialpsychologie und Visionäre Gesellschaftskritik*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag GmbH.
- Billig, M. 2005a. *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humor*. London: Sage.
- Billig, M. 2005b. "Comic Racism and Violence." In S. Lockyer & M. Pickering (eds.) *Beyond a Joke: The Limits of Humour*. Basingstone: Palgrave Macmillan, 25-44.
- Braune, J. 2015. "Erich Fromm: Lives and Voices, or Life and Voice?" In R. Funk & N. McLaughlin (eds.) *Towards a Human Science. The Relevance of Erich Fromm for Today*. Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag. 91-98.
- Braune, J. 2014. *Erich Fromm's Revolutionary Hope. Prophetic Messianism as a Critical Theory of the Future*. Rotterdam/Boston/Taipei: Sense Publishers.
- Burston, D. 1991. *The Legacy of Erich Fromm*. Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press.
- Callender C. & Edney, R. 2012. *Introducing Time*. London: Icon Books Ltd.

- Chapman, G., Cleese, J., Gilliam, T., Idle, E., Jones, T., Palin, M. & McCabe, B. 2014. *The Python's Autobiography By The Pythons*. ebook. Retrieved from iTunes Store. London: Orion.
- Cleese, J. 2014. *So, Anyway...* ebook. Retrieved from iTunes Store. London: Random House Books.
- Comte-Sponville, A. 2001. *Pieni kirja suurista hyveistä*. Trans. V. Hämeen-Anttila. Helsinki: Basam Books Oy.
- Cortina, M. 2015. "Fromm's View of the Human Condition in Light of Contemporary Evolutionary and Developmental Knowledge." In R. Funk & N. McLaughlin (eds.) *Towards a Human Science. The Relevance of Erich Fromm for Today*. Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag. 157-185.
- Cortina, M. & Maccoby, M. (eds.) 1996. *A Prophetic Analyst. Erich Fromm's Contribution to Psychoanalysis*. Northvale, New Jersey / London: Jason Aronson Inc.
- Critchley, S. 2004. *On Humour*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Davies, Christie. 2011. *Jokes and Targets*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- De Koning, E. & Weiss, R. L. 2002. "The Relational Humor Inventory: Functions of Humor in Close Relationships" In *American Journal of Family Therapy*, vol 30, no. 1, 1-18.
- De Sousa, R. 1987. "When is it Wrong to Laugh?" In J. Morreall (ed.) *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*. Albany: State University Press of New York Press.
- Durkin, K. 2014. *The Radical Humanism of Erich Fromm*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
- Emery, D. 2012. "Sexual Assault Crisis Group Slams Daniel Tosh, 'Rape Jokes Are Never Funny'" In *Radar Online* 12 July 2012. Retrieved from <http://radaronline.com/exclusives/2012/07/daniel-tosh-rape-joke-comedy-central/> Accessed 21.6.2015.
- Erasmus 1511/1941. *The Praise of Folly*. Trans. Hoyt Hopewell Hudson. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Ervin-Tripp, S. M. & Lampert, M. D. 2009. "The occasioning of self-disclosure humor." In D. Chiaro & N. R. Norrick (eds.) *Humor in Interaction*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. 3-27.
- Ferner, R. E. & Aronson J. K. 2013. "Laughter and MIRTH (Methodical Investigation of Risibility, Therapeutic and Harmful): narrative synthesis." In *The BMJ*. Retrieved from <http://www.bmj.com/content/347/bmj.f7274> Accessed 19.6.2015.
- Freud, S. 1905/1968a. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. Trans. James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis.
- Freud, S. 1927/1968b. "Humour" In *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XXI (1927-1931). Trans. James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press. 159-166
- Friedman, L. J. 2013. *The Lives of Erich Fromm. Love's Prophet*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Friend, T. 2002. "What's So Funny? A Scientific Attempt to Discover Why We Laugh." In *The New Yorker*, November 11, 2002.
- Fromm, E. 2012/1975 or 1978?. "Appendix I. On the Relativity of Conceptualisation." Unpublished text. Here I have used the original manuscript, Erich Fromm Institute Tübingen.
- Fromm, E. 2009. "Being Centrally Related to the Patient." In R. Funk (ed.) *The Clinical Erich Fromm. Personal Accounts and Papers on Therapeutic Technique*. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi. 7-37.
- Fromm, E. 1994/1997. *Love, Sexuality, and Matriarchy. About Gender*. Ed. Rainer Funk. New York: Fromm International Publishing Corporation.
- Fromm, E. 1992a/2010. *Beyond Freud. From Individual to Social Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Rainer Funk. New York: AMHF.
- Fromm, E. 1992b/1994. *On Being Human*. New York: Continuum.
- Fromm, E. 1991a/1998. *The Art of Listening*. New York: Continuum.
- Fromm, E. 1991b/2010. *The Pathology of Normalcy*. New York: AMHF.
- Fromm, E. 1990. *The Revision of Psychoanalysis*. Boulder/San Francisco/Oxford: Westview Press.
- Fromm, E. 1989/1997. *The Art of Being*. New York: Continuum.
- Fromm, E. 1983/1986. *For the Love of Life*. Trans. Robert and Rita Kimber. Ed. Hans Jürgen Schultz. New York: The Free Press.
- Fromm, E. 1981. *On Disobedience and Other Essays*. New York: The Seabury Press.
- Fromm, E. 1979a. *Greatness and Limitations of Freud's Thought*. New York: Open Road / Integrated Media. ebook. Retrieved from iTunes Store.
- Fromm, E. 1979b. "Marx and Religion." In S. J. Miri, R. Lake & T. M. Kress (eds.) *Reclaiming the Sane Society*. Rotterdam/Boston/Taipei: Sense Publishers. 95-99. Here I have used the original manuscript, Erich Fromm Institute Tübingen.
- Fromm, E. 1976. *To Have or To Be?* New York: Open Road / Integrated Media. ebook. Retrieved from iTunes Store.
- Fromm, E. 1973/1992. *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*. New York: Picador/Henry Holt and Company.
- Fromm, E. 1970/1991. *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis. Essays on Freud, Marx, and Social Psychology*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Fromm, E. 1968/2010. *The Revolution of Hope*. New York: AMHF.
- Fromm, E. 1967a. "You Shall Be as Gods." Interview with Richard Hefner 1967 (57'). In CD 34, listened in The Erich Fromm Institute Tübingen.
- Fromm, E. 1967b. "Do We Still Love Life?" In *MacCall's*, Vol. XCIV (No. 11, August 1967). 57, 108-110. Here used the original manuscript, Erich Fromm Institute Tübingen.
- Fromm, E. 1966a/1991. *You Shall Be as Gods. A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and Its Tradition*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Fromm, E. 1966b. "A Global Philosophy of Man". In *The Humanist*, Yellow Springs, Ohio, 26, 1966, 117-122.
- Fromm, E. 1966c. "Obstacles to Love." Lecture 11th April 1966. In CD 26 in the Erich Fromm Institute Tübingen.

- Fromm, E. 1964/2010. *The Heart of Man. Its Genius for Good and Evil*. New York: AMHF.
- Fromm, E. 1963a/2004. *The Dogma of Christ. And other essays on religion, psychology and culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Fromm, E. 1963b. "The Psychological Roots of War and Destruction, Second Lecture". Lecture given in YMCA New York. Given in April 1963. In CD 28 in The Erich Fromm Institute Tübingen.
- Fromm, E. 1962/2006. *Beyond the Chains of Illusions: My Encounter with Marx and Freud*. New York/London: Continuum.
- Fromm, E. 1961. *Marx's Concept of Man*. New York: F. Ungar Publishing Co. ebook. Retrieved from iTunes Store.
- Fromm, E. 1960. *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*. New York: Harped and Brothers.
- Fromm, E. 1959a. *Sigmund Freud's Mission: An Analysis of His Personality and Influence*. New York: World Perspectives Vol 21, Harper and Brothers.
- Fromm, E. 1959b. "Values, Psychology, and Human Existence." In A. Maslow (ed.) *New Knowledge in Human Values*, NY: Harper. Here used the original manuscript, Erich Fromm Institute Tübingen.
- Fromm, E. 1956a/2000. *The Art of Loving*. New York: Continuum.
- Fromm, E. 1956b. "Psychic Needs and Society." In E. Fromm *Beyond Freud. From Individual to Social Psychoanalysis*. New York: AMHF. 74-82. Here I have used the original manuscript, Erich Fromm Institute Tübingen.
- Fromm, E. 1955/1990. *The Sane Society*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Fromm, E. 1951. *The Forgotten Language. An Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairy Tales, And Myths*. New York: Rinehart and Co.
- Fromm, E. 1950/1977. *Psychoanalysis and Religion*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- Fromm, E. 1947/2003. *Man for Himself. An inquiry into the psychology of ethics*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Fromm, E. 1942. "Faith as a Character Trait". In *Psychiatry: Journal of the biology and pathology of interpersonal relations*. Vol 5, no. 3, August 1942. 307-319. Here used the manuscript, Erich Fromm Institute Tübingen.
- Fromm, E. 1941/1994. *Escape From Freedom*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Fromm Forum 19/2015. Tübingen: International Erich Fromm Society.
- Fry, S. 2010. *The Fry Chronicles*. London: Penguin Books.
- Funk, R. & McLaughlin, N. (eds.) 2015. *Towards a Human Science. The Relevance of Erich Fromm for Today*. Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag.
- Funk, R. 2009a. *The Clinical Erich Fromm. Personal Accounts and Papers on Therapeutic Technique*. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi.
- Funk, R. 2009b. "Direct Meeting". In R. Funk (ed.) *The Clinical Erich Fromm. Personal Accounts and Papers on Therapeutic Technique*. Rodopi. Amsterdam/New York. 59-70.
- Funk, R. 2000. *Erich Fromm. His Life and Ideas. An Illustrated Biography*. Trans. Ian Portman and Manuela Kunkel. New York/London: Continuum.

- Funk, R. 1996. *The Erich Fromm Archives. Catalogue List of the Erich Fromm Library*. Tübingen.
- Funk, R. 1988. "The Jewish Roots of Erich Fromm's Humanistic Thinking." Retrieved from https://opus4.kobv.de/opus4-Fromm/frontdoor/deliver/index/docId/9882/file/Funk_R_1988f.pdf Accessed 22.6.2015.
- Funk, R. 1982. *Erich Fromm: The Courage to be Human*. Trans. Michael Shaw. New York: Continuum.
- Gourevitch, A. 2009. "Elation and Fortification." In R. Funk (ed.) *The Clinical Erich Fromm. Personal Accounts and Papers on Therapeutic Technique*. Rodopi. Amsterdam/New York. 125-126.
- Gruner, C. R. 2000. *The Game of Humor. A Comprehensive Theory of Why We Laugh*. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers.
- Götz, I. L. 2002. *Faith, Humor, and Paradox*. London: Praeger.
- Hazlitt, W. 1819/1951. *Lectures on English Comic Writers*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Hibberd, J. 2011. "Daniel Tosh at TCA: 'I'm not sexist or racist, I just like the jokes'" In *Inside TV* 5 January 2011. Retrieved from: <http://www.ew.com/article/2011/01/05/daniel-tosh-defends-jokes> Accessed 21.6.2015.
- Hietalahti, J. 2010. *Epämukavaa – sepä mukavaa. Yhteiskuntafilosofinen tutkielma komiikan, naurun ja väkivallan suhteesta*. Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto.
- Hietalahti, J. 2014. "Naurun päässä hämöttää kauhu." In *Paatos* 2/2014. <http://jarjestot.uta.fi/aatos/paatos/2014-02/naurukauhu.html> Accessed 21.6.2015.
- Hietalahti, J., Hirvonen, O., Toivanen, J. & Vaaja, T. forthcoming 2016. "Humour, Insults, and Freedom of Speech." In *French Cultural Studies*.
- Hobbes, T. 1651/1962. *Leviathan: On the matter, forme and power of a commonwealth ecclesiasticall and civil*. New York: Collier Books.
- Holpuch, A. 2012. "Daniel Tosh apologises for rape joke as fellow comedians defend topic." In *The Guardian* 11 July 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/us-news-blog/2012/jul/11/daniel-tosh-apologises-rape-joke> Accessed 21.6.2015.
- Horney Eckardt, M. 1996. "Fromm's Humanistic Ethics and the Role of the Prophet." In M. Cortina & M. Maccoby (eds.) *A Prophetic Analyst. Erich Fromm's Contributions to Psychoanalysis*. Northvale, New Jersey, London: Jason Aronson Inc. 151-165.
- Horkheimer, M. & Adorno T. W. 1944/2002. *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Huizinga, J. 1955. *Homo Ludens. A study of the play element in culture*. Boston: Thea Beacon Press.
- Hutcheson, F. 1750/2009. *Reflections Upon Laughter, And Remarks Upon The Fable Of The Bees*. LaVergne: Kessinger Publishing's Legacy Reprints.

- Ingleby, D. 1991. "Introduction". In E. Fromm 1955/2008 *The Sane Society*. London, Routledge Classics. xvi-lv.
- Jukola, S. 2014. "The Commercialization of Research and the Quest for the Objectivity of Science." In *Foundations of Science*. Retrieved from <http://link.springer.com.ezproxy.jyu.fi/article/10.1007/s10699-014-9377-8> Sited 25.6.2015.
- Kant, I. 1790/1987. *Critique of Judgement*. Trans. W. S. Pluhar. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co.
- Kessler, M. & Funk, R. (eds.) 1992. *Erich Fromm und die Frankfurter Schule*. Tübingen: Francke Verlag.
- Kierkegaard, S. 1846/2009. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*. Trans. Alastair Hannay. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kirsh, G. A. and Kuiper, N.A. 2003. Positive and negative aspects of sense of humor. Associations with the constructs of individualism and relatedness. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 16 (1), 33-62.
- Kivimäki, A., Vahtikari, V. & Vesterinen, S. (eds.) 2002. *Ikivanha. Antiikin vitsejä ja sukkeluuksia*. Helsinki: Tammi.
- Knapp, G. P. 1989. *The Art of Living. Erich Fromm's Life and Works*. New York/Bern/Frankfurt am Main/Paris: Peter Lang.
- Krikmann, A. 2006. "Contemporary Linguistic Theories of Humor". In *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 33/2006. 27-58. Retrieved from <http://www.ceeol.com/aspx/issuedetails.aspx?issueid=5c703caf-597f-43ab-be3c-d67037264451&articleId=f100d179-f898-47c6-ab88-ac809a78ab14> Accessed 19.6.2015
- Kuipers, G. 2008. "The sociology of humor." In V. Raskin (ed.) *The Primer of Humor Research*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter. 361-398.
- Laineste, L. 2008. "Politics of Joking: Ethnic Jokes and Their Targets in Estonia (1890s-2007). In *Folklore* vol. 40. 117-146. URL: <http://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol40/laineste.pdf> Accessed 29.8.2015.
- Laineste, L. 2009. "Political Jokes in Post-Socialist Estonia (2000-2007). In A. Krikmann & L. Laineste (eds.) *Permitted Laughter. Socialist, Post-Socialist, and Never-Socialist Humour*. Tartu: ELM Scholarly Press. 41-72.
- Lesser, R. 2009. "There Is Nothing Polite in Anybody's Unconscious." In R. Funk (ed.) *The Clinical Erich Fromm. Personal Accounts and Papers on Therapeutic Technique*. Rodopi. Amsterdam/New York. 91-100.
- Levy, R. 2014. "On psychology and Libertarian Socialism of Erich Fromm. Towards an Empirically Based Psychological Retrofit." In S. J. Miri, R. Lake & T. M. Kress (eds.) *Reclaiming the Sane Society*. Rotterdam/Boston/Taipei: Sense Publishers. 3-15.
- Lewis, P. 2006. *Cracking Up: American Humor in a Time of Conflict*. Chicago: University Press of Chicago Press.
- Little, L. E. 2008. "Regulating Funny: Humor and the Law." In *Cornell Law Review*, Vol. 94, , 1236-1292. Retrieved from: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1124627## Accessed 23.6.2015.

- Lundgren, S. 1998. *Fight Against Idols. Erich Fromm on Religion, Judaism and the Bible*. Frankfurt am Main/Berlin/Bern/New York/Paris/Wien: Peter Lang.
- Maccoby, M. 2014a. Discussion in the *1st International Erich Fromm Conference* in Berlin. June 2014.
- Maccoby, M. 2014b. "Building on Erich Fromm's scientific contributions." In *Fromm Forum* 18/2014. 7-15.
- Maccoby, M. 2009. "Fromm Didn't Want to Be a Frommian." In R. Funk (ed.) *The Clinical Erich Fromm. Personal Accounts and Papers on Therapeutic Technique*. Rodopi. Amsterdam/New York. 141-144.
- Maccoby, M. 1996. "The Two Voices of Erich Fromm: The Prophetic and the Analytic". In M. Cortina & M. Maccoby (eds.) *A Prophetic Analyst. Erich Fromm's Contributions to Psychoanalysis*. Northvale, New Jersey, London: Jason Aronson Inc. 61-92.
- Matusaka, T. 2004. "When does play panting occur during social play in wild chimpanzees?" In *Primates*, Vol. 45, 221-229.
- McGhee, P. E. 1999. *Health, Healing and the Amuse System: Humor as Survival Training*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.
- McGlynn, K. "Daniel Tosh Apologizes For Rape Joke Aimed At Female Audience Member At Laugh Factory." In *The Huffington Post* 10 July 2012. Retrieved from: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/10/daniel-tosh-rape-joke-laugh-factory_n_1662882.html Accessed 21.6.2015.
- McLaughlin, N. 1998. "How to Become a Forgotten Intellectual: Intellectual Movements and the Rise and Fall of Erich Fromm." In *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 13, No. 2. 215-246.
- Merkur, D. 2010. *Explorations of the Psychoanalytic Mystics*. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi.
- Mersal, I. 2011. "Revolutionary Humor." In *Globalizations*, Vol. 8, Issue 5, 669-674.
- Mihalcea, R. & Strappavara, C. 2005. "Making computers laugh: Investigations in Automatic Humor Recognition". In *Proceedings of the Joint Conference on Human Language Technology / Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing (HLT/EMNLP)*, Vancouver, October, 2005.
- Miller, M. & Fry, W. F. 2009 "The Effect of Mirthful Laughter on the Human Cardiovascular System". *Medical Hypotheses*, Vol. 73, No. 5, 636-639.
- Miri, S. J., Lake, R. & Kress, T. M. (eds.) 2014. *Reclaiming the Sane Society*. Rotterdam/Boston/Taipei: Sense Publishers.
- Miri, S. J. 2014. "Humanism and Sociological Imagination in a Frommesque Perspective." In Miri, S. J., Lake, R. & Kress, T. M. (eds.) *Reclaiming the Sane Society*. Rotterdam/Boston/Taipei: Sense Publishers. 31-35.
- Moisio, O-P. 2007. "Persoonan loppu" In J. Kotkavirta (ed.) *Persoonia vai ihmisiä*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus. 208-232.
- Morreall, J. 2009. *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

- Morreall, J. 1983. *Taking Laughter Seriously*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Nijholt, A. 2014. "Towards humor modelling and facilitation in smart environments". In Yong Gu Ji & Sooshin Choi (eds.) *Advances in Affective and Pleasurable Design*. AHFE Conference, 260-269.
- Oring, E. 2003. *Engaging Humor*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Panksepp, J. & Burgdorf, J. 2003. "'Laughing' rats and the evolutionary antecedents of human joy?" In *Physiology & Behavior*, Volume 79, Issue 3, August 2003. 533-547.
- Pekkola, M. 2010. *Prophet of Radicalism. Erich Fromm and the Figurative Constitution of the Crisis of Modernity*. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä.
- Pihlström, S. forthcoming 2016. *Death and Finitude: Toward a pragmatic transcendental anthropology of human limits and mortality*. Unpublished manuscript. Lexington Books.
- Powell, C. 1988. "A phenomenological analysis of humour in society." In C. Powell & G. Paton (eds.) *Humour in Society: Resistance and Control*. Basingstoke: MacMillan.
- Raskin, V. (ed.) 2008. *The Primer of Humor Research*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Raskin, V. 1985. *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel.
- Redding, P. 2010. "Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel" In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Spring 2012 Edition. Retrieved from: <http://stanford.library.usyd.edu.au/archives/spr2012/entries/hegel/#SciLog>. Accessed 13th April 2016.
- Robert, C. & Yan, W. 2007. "The case for developing new research on humor and culture in organizations: Toward a higher grade of manure. In *Research in Personnel and Human Resource Management* 26. 205-267.
- Schaar, J. H. 1961. *Escape from Authority. The perspectives of Erich Fromm*. New York: Basic Books, Inc.
- Schechter, D. E. 2009. "Awakening the Patient." In R. Funk (ed.) *The Clinical Erich Fromm. Personal Accounts and Papers on Therapeutic Technique*. Rodopi. Amsterdam/New York. 73-78.
- Schopenhauer, A. 1910. *The World as Will and Idea. Volume I*. Trans. R. B. Haldane & J. Kemp. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/theworldaswillan01schouoft> Accessed 19.6.2015.
- Seppälä, S. 2012. *Missä on liikaa, sieltä puuttuu jotakin. Juutalaisen huumorin maailma*. Helsinki: Kirjapaja.
- Silva Garcia, J. S. 2009. "His Way to Clarity and Humaneness." In R. Funk (ed.) *The Clinical Erich Fromm. Personal Accounts and Papers on Therapeutic Technique*. Rodopi. Amsterdam/New York. 145-152.
- Silva Garcia, J. 1989. "Erich Fromm in Mexico - 1950-1973." In *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, New York, 1989. 244-257
- Smuts, A. 2010. "The Ethics of Humor: Can Your Sense of Humor Be Wrong?" In *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*. June 2010, Vol. 13, Issue 3. 333-347.

- Soniak, M. 2012. "Was Manhattan Really Bought for \$24?". In *Mental Floss*. Retrieved from <http://mentalfloss.com/article/12657/was-manhattan-really-bought-24> Accessed 21.6.2015.
- Spalding, H. D. (ed.) 2001. *Encyclopedia of Jewish Humor. From Biblical Times to the Modern Age*. New York: Jonathan David Publishers.
- Spencer, H. 1911. "The Physiology of Laughter". In *Essays on Education and Kindred Subjects*. London: Dent. Retrieved from <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16510/16510-h/16510-h.htm> Accessed 19.6.2015.
- Swabey, M. 1961. *Comic Laughter. A Philosophical Essay*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Tauber, E. S. 2009. "Words are Ways." In R. Funk (ed.) *The Clinical Erich Fromm. Personal Accounts and Papers on Therapeutic Technique*. Rodopi. Amsterdam/New York. 131-134.
- Thomson, A. 2009. *Erich Fromm. Explorer of the human condition*. Palgrave Macmillan. New York.
- Tosh, D. 2012. Twitter. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/danieltosh/status/222796636559130624> and <https://twitter.com/danieltosh/status/222796532653629441> Accessed 21.6.2015.
- Toth, E. 1981. "Female Wits" In *The Massachusetts Review*. Vol 22, No. 4 (Winter, 1981), 783-793.
- Valitutti, A., Toivonen, H., Doucet, A., Toivanen, J. 2013. "'Let Everything Turn Well In Your Wife': Generation of Adult Humor Using Lexical Constraints." In *The 51st Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics*. Retrieved from: https://www.cs.helsinki.fi/u/htoivone/pubs/acl2013_humor.pdf Accessed 22.6.2015.
- Varol, O. O. 2014. "Revolutionary Humor." In *Southern California Interdisciplinary Law Journal* 555 (2014), Lewis & Clark Law School Legal Studies Research Paper No. 2014-3. 555-594.
- Vecchio, R. P., Justin, J. E. & Pearce, C. L. 2009. "The Influence of Leader Humor on Relationships between Leader Behavior and Follower Outcomes" In *Journal of Managerial Issues* Vol. XXI, No. 2, 171-194.
- Weaver, S. 2011. *The Rhetoric of Racist Humour. US, UK and Global Race Joking*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Wilde, L. 2004. *Erich Fromm and the Quest for Solidarity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Zimmer, M. 2015. "Erich Fromm in China. A Review of the Reception of his Thought in China (1961-2013). Preliminary Results." In *Fromm Forum* 19/2015. Tübingen: International Erich Fromm Society.

ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

**THE RELEVANCE OF "SOCIAL CHARACTER"
TO HUMOR STUDIES**

by

Hietalahti, J.

To be submitted for publication.

The relevance of “social character” to humor studies

1 Introduction

This article stems from two general paradoxes relating to humor and laughter: first, that everyone is presumed to have a *unique sense of humor*, yet *the sense of humor is typically shared* with others as we are eager to laugh together at same jokes and comedies. Second, there are plenty of competing theories of humor which offer, if not contradictory, at least different explanations about the nature of humor. For example, humor is claimed to be a *conservative force* (e.g. Speier 1998) but it has *revolutionary potential* (e.g. Scott 1985; Gouin 2004); or it is said that humor *brings people together* (e.g. Provine 2000) and *builds boundaries between different social groups* (e.g. Billig 2005; Kuipers 2006); or *we laugh at those who we see as inferior to us* (e.g. Gruner 2000) but *the most fruitful targets of laughter are those in power* (e.g. Bakhtin 1984). In this article, I argue that Erich Fromm’s (1900-1980) critical humanistic works¹ offer a way to understand the above paradoxes about humor. My hypothesis is that Fromm’s concept of *social character* is pivotal if we are to understand how deeply humor is entrenched as a social phenomenon, and it is a key concept in grasping *the dynamic nature of humor*. Social character explains how an individual and a society are in a reciprocal relationship, and when applied to humor research, it offers a rich inspiration for a new way of analyzing, say, fun and laughter.²

The central concept of this paper is the “social character”. By this concept Fromm refers to “the core of the character common to most members of a culture” (Fromm 1948: 309). As Rainer Funk, Fromm’s last assistant and his literature executor, has observed, social character helps to understand how members of the same culture are receptive to the shared ideals and general ideas. He claims that the concept of social character “makes possible a new understanding of social processes.” (Funk 1982: 20) Previously, this concept has been basically non-existent in the field of humor research, and the aim of this paper is to discuss the significance of this concept for humor research. The central argument is that social character provides a novel way of understanding the depth of humor and laughter as social phenomena. Humor is always bound to a concrete context, and one has to be sensitive to the prevailing cultural situation to analyze the various meanings of humor (see Kuipers 2008). My Frommian interpretation about humor develops from this position; I argue that *humor is a form of relatedness*, and if we are to understand humor in a comprehensive man-

¹ Generally, Fromm’s theoretical system is built on a visionary combination of Sigmund Freud’s and Karl Marx’s theories. (see e.g. Fromm 1962; Funk and McLaughlin 2015: 21)

² Although Fromm refers to laughter, smiling, joy and such from time to time (e.g. Fromm 1947: 86; 1976: 148; 1991: 18; 1992b: 36), he never analyzed the philosophy of humor extensively. Rather, he uses, for instance, jokes as examples and a way to demonstrate a point. However, he mentions how humor reflects the deeper attitudes (e.g. Fromm 1973: 673), and claims that the study of social character should include also analysis of, for instance, jokes (Fromm 1981: 35–36; 1973: 614). In this paper, I aim to make the first opening of this Frommian task.

ner, it has to be interpreted in relation to the question of *what it means to be a human being*. In addition, I claim that social character and humor should be studied reciprocally. In this framework, the concept of social character deepens our understanding of humor, but humor research also adds crucial insights to the research of social character. I want to stress that this is not a circular argument but an interdisciplinary way to study both humor and social character.

The research question presented above sets certain limits to the current paper. First, this paper is located under the banner of social philosophy, as well as that of philosophical anthropology.³ I will focus on the ideas from social philosophy which draw from real human phenomena, that is, humor and laughter. It is worth noting that it is possible to study Fromm's concept of social character in an empirical manner—Fromm himself conducted empirical studies on social character in the 1930s and 1950s-1960s (see Fromm 1984; Fromm and Maccoby 1970)—but concrete empirical humor research settings are left aside from this paper, as the task is to offer a new social philosophical perspective on the phenomenon of humor. I acknowledge that Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) concept of *habitus*—which he developed some decades later than Fromm did his concept of social character—has a certain resemblance to what Fromm calls the social character, and humor could be studied in Bourdieu's theoretical framework, too. However, there are crucial differences between Fromm and Bourdieu, as Kieran Durkin (2014) and Thomas Meisenhelder (2006) have noted. Fromm is not as purely a sociological thinker as Bourdieu, but tries to understand the underlying social psychological aspects of human behavior, and how they are related to the existential questions of humanity. Besides sociological thinking, Fromm's studies in social character include insights from depth psychology, and a humanistic vision.

According to Fromm, the basic human problem is how to be related to others, as isolation means insanity and destruction (Fromm 1962: 136). In other words, the central problem of living is how an individual can function in a social setting. In this, the problem of living is also a moral concern for Fromm, as mere adaptation is not a way to guarantee happiness (see Fromm 1941; 1947), because societies are not guaranteed to support human happiness (see Fromm 1955). I follow this guideline when analyzing the social phenomena of humor and laughter, which implies that humor, too, is a moral concern. This does not mean that Fromm is a moralistic writer. Instead, Fromm tirelessly questions common ways of living and challenges many basic assumptions of our societies. As a radical humanist, he does not settle for purely negative criticism, but also tries to offer solutions and positive formulations about various social phenomena. My thinking follows the same line, and I question the general assumption that humor is at heart a positive attribute or phenomenon (see also Billig 2005). That kind of universal claim about the nature of humor is implausible, and instead, humor should be seen as a dynamic phenomenon. To understand

³ For instance, Martin Jay (1973: 89) has noted that Fromm is sympathetic to philosophical anthropology.

this dynamic aspect of humor, I show how Fromm's thinking can be connected to both classical and contemporary humor research, and how previous humor studies can be further developed by Fromm's social theories. Also, as humor has a large role in our lives (although not always recognized as such), it is implicitly connected to the question of what a good life is and what kind of role humor plays in it. Humor is, thus, an ethical question.

For conceptual clarity, I use humor as an umbrella concept, as it is customary in Anglo-American humor research. I follow the basic idea of incongruity theory, that is, that humor is based on a paradox. Laughter, then, refers to laughter triggered by humor. As a general overview, this paper is constructed in the following way: First, I will elucidate and discuss the concept of social character (this will continue throughout the article). Second, I analyze how humor fits with Fromm's character typology, and how this typology can deepen and strengthen previous theoretical positions on humor. Third, I apply Fromm's theories for understanding the dynamic aspects of humor—both in theoretical and everyday level. Finally, I wrap up the general argument and share some possibilities for later Frommian humor research.

2 Social character and humor

Fromm's concept of social character provides a critical basis for analyzing humor as a cultural phenomenon, and it is a pivotal concept for getting to grips with the dynamic nature of humor. Social character is "*the nucleus of the character structure, which is shared by most members of the same culture*" (Fromm 1962: 283), and Fromm adds that social character can be understood only in reference to its *function*. Here, the questions are how humor is shared and what its significance is in relation to social character. Of course, there are other humor researchers who have stressed the interpersonal nature of humor; for example, Henri Bergson (1913: 5–6) argues that laughter is always laughter of a group; that is, laughter is always shared. Robert R. Provine (2000: 44–45) has been impressed by Bergson's findings, and he interprets them to mean that we tend to laugh more frequently in company than in solitude. This observation is most likely correct, but humor and laughter can be considered to be social in a deeper Frommian way. The numeric level of socialness— that more than one person is present— does not really explain the nature of laughter. Some humor studies (e.g. Lockyer and Pickering 2005; Kuipers 2008) stress that humor is a quintessentially social phenomenon as, for instance, jokes require a joker and an audience, and that humor's dynamics and meanings vary between social contexts. These observations are important, and in this paper I aim to develop them in a specifically social philosophical direction. Instead of focusing on, say, a person's social status (see Robinson and Smith-Lovin 2001) and its significance to humor in a particular situation, I analyze the general tendencies of shared humanity and humor.

In my Frommian interpretation, humor and laughter are expressions of a person's character, and they should be considered as character traits. Fromm understands character as "*the relatively permanent system of all noninstinctual*

strivings through which man relates himself to the human and natural world." (Fromm 1973: 381) For Fromm, character is a dynamic concept, that is, character is formed through life experiences, and is to some extent changeable by insights and new experiences (Fromm 1947: 36–37). If humor is agreed to be a part of the total character structure⁴, and essentially a social attribute, then following Fromm's theoretical framework, humor is an expression of *relatedness* between individuals, and thus *pivotaly a social phenomenon*. Previously, Giselinde Kuipers has noted that humor is a social phenomenon, and for her it is a form of communication which is culturally shaped.⁵ She stresses, for instance, that the "themes people joke about are central to the social, cultural and moral order of a society or a social group." (Kuipers 2008: 361) Kuipers' observations are important, and Fromm's insights add to these a crucial factor: the shared strivings and passions which lie behind humor and laughter. To understand these, social character is an essential addition to existing humor research. As Fromm puts it in *Beyond the Chains of Illusions*, the aim is to understand "the laws that govern the life of the individual man, and the laws of society—that is, of men in their social existence." (Fromm 1962: 12)

As Funk (1982: 21) summarizes, the general elements from which social character is constituted are socio-economic factors, ideas and ideals, as well as fundamental existential needs, such as the need for relatedness and a frame of orientation. In short, social character "internalizes external necessities" to serve the economic and social system (Fromm 1941: 280). In this sense, social character is a special kind of reward system: we are psychologically satisfied when we manage to adjust ourselves accordingly to the current social system.⁶ Fromm's theoretical position, then, offers an explanation of "how certain psychic attitudes common to members of a group are related to their common life experiences." (Fromm 1963: 6–7) Roughly put, the function of social character is to make people want to act as they have to act, and to find gratification when they act according to the requirements of the prevailing culture (Fromm 1962: 286–287). Humor fits well in this picture. We are intensely satisfied when we laugh together with others, and the shared targets of humor build a shared worldview (see Provine 2000); in this light, the relationship between humor and social character is reciprocal, as social character supports a so-called normal way to relate to humor, and humor strengthens the prevailing social character. This opens the idea that humor, as analyzed in relation to social character, does not refer only to the contents of jokes—what topics are considered to be funny—but

⁴ For instance, Willibald Ruch (1998: 5, 11) claims that a sense of humor should be examined as a part of individual's personality. A sense of humor refers to an ability to perceive, as well as to enjoy, different kinds of contradictions and conceptual conflicts. In accordance with his or her personality and sense of humor, an individual conceives, shares and channels different kinds of humorous comprehensions.

⁵ Kuipers uses the term "social character of humor" but this does not refer to Fromm's concept of social character; she speaks on a general level about how humor is social by its nature.

⁶ Many Fromm scholars have discussed Fromm's concept of social character in length (e.g. Funk 1982, Maccoby 2002, Durkin 2014), so I will handle the concept here only briefly, and focus more on how it can be used in humor research.

also a more general approach to humor; how we perceive humor, how we understand the significance of humor in our everyday lives, and so forth.

In the early attempts to solve the social function of humor, Henri Bergson (1913) offers an original theory. He ends up claiming that laughter, triggered by a humorous sight, is a tool for social punishment, because laughter guides individuals behaving ridiculously to act in a normal manner. Bergson's theory is inspiring, but his interpretation is too fixed as he considers this punishing element to be central for all laughter in every single society. In later *conflict approaches* to humor, it is proposed that humor functions as a weapon, a form of attack, or a means of defense (see Speier 1998; Kuipers 2008), and a *phenomenological approach* to humor suggests that humor is a specific kind of worldview which is in contrast to a so-called serious worldview (see Zijderfeld 1982; Kuipers 2008). These are sharp observations, but if my position on humor—that humor is a dynamic phenomenon—is correct, it is hard to make this kind of universal, fixed claim about humor. However, the various explanations of humor make sense if they are interpreted as a part of a wider social character; for a certain kind of character humor is a weapon, and for another it is a revealing point of view which challenges the way the world is normally perceived. From this theoretical position, it is possible to start to analyze the current humor catalogue in its unique historical situation; and especially what can be found beyond humor and laughter.

Sigmund Freud (1905) has made preliminary observations about the hidden significance of jokes, and concludes that jokes can be used to express thoughts that are normally forbidden in social interaction. Freud suggests that joking offers a safety valve which enables us to release internal pressures in an approved manner. The genius of Freud's idea is that even though joking may be seemingly innocent, we are able to express negative feelings and emotions, like hatred or contempt, via laughter. Also, in a later article Freud (1927) emphasizes how humor⁷ is a specific way to relate to the world. Freud's insights are important as they try to grasp the unconscious mechanisms of humor. In short, Freud argues that there are motivations behind humor of which the laughing agent is not always aware.

Even though Bergson's and Freud's general theories about humor are limited in many aspects (e.g. Bergson's claim that we always laugh at mechanic rigidity, and Freud's summarizations of energy surpluses as the reason for laughter), my Frommian interpretation of humor can be considered to complement to the above mentioned two principles (humor is a social phenomenon, and humor expresses deeper attitudes). In this, I respect Fromm's own general studies about humanity and his Freudo-Marxian theoretical basis.⁸ However,

⁷ Here Freud uses the concept of humor differently to the way it is considered in contemporary Anglo-American humor research; for Freud, humor is not an umbrella concept but a specific attitude.

⁸ Interestingly, even though Fromm critically discusses almost in his every book Freud's psychoanalytical insights, he does not handle Freud's book *Jokes and their relation to unconscious* (1905). Even so, Fromm is convinced that humor has a significant role in his theory about social character (e.g. Fromm 1981: 35–36).

instead of trying to find a clear function for humor, I offer a viewpoint on the social significance of humor; as it will be argued, humor has no simple function as it signifies different things for different kinds of personalities. This position develops previous insights in relation to humor: others (e.g. Lewis 1997; Lockyer and Pickering 2005) have stressed that a meaning of a joke is always created in a unique context, and the central factors are the social background of the joker and his or her relationship to the audience and to the butt of the joke, as well as whether it is mediated or conversational humor (Kuipers 2008). These notions are important, but none of the previous studies have tried to deepen the picture with Fromm's character typology.

I adapt Bergson's and Freud's suggestion that humor reflects, in one way or other, social norms and codes. This idea is congruent with the widely accepted incongruity theory (for various formulations of this theory, see Morreall 2012). According to incongruity theory, there is a paradox at the heart of humor, and to be more specific, a contradiction between cultural categorizations. The typical cases are, for example, "a human acts like a machine", "an animal acts like a human", or "a man wears women's clothing". Implicitly, the paradoxical nature of humor requires a certain kind of serious backbone; the perceived incongruity has to be compared to something that is considered normal. There would be nothing ridiculous about men wearing women's clothing if there were no cultural separation between the clothes that different genders wear. Also, humor has to be comprehensible, that is, we have to be able to recognize the cultural contradiction. If someone tells a joke which handles, say, formal logic, it might be incomprehensible and not funny at all to those who are not familiar with the used concepts. This conceptual background of humor supports the basic claim that humor is a social phenomenon; without a shared language, there is no shared humor. The level of the words of humor is, however, not enough, and following Fromm, the question about humor should be, then, what the basic attitudes are behind humor. This question, of course, is also related to the question of themes of humor, but in my interpretation they are only of secondary importance. The Frommian genius stroke is to realize that humor is not just shared laughter and common jokes, but a character-rooted form of relatedness.

Generally speaking, humor offers an enjoyable way to relate to others, and this is well-known in everyday life: laughter feels good, and mirth sparks one's mind. In a shared moment of fun, there is a sense of belonging to a wider social group (see Provine 2000). Even if a sense of humor is typically considered to be a unique attribute, we are able to share this unique aspect with others when we laugh at the same humorous sight. Thus, through laughter we are related to others as we share a position on the same cultural contradictions and the serious basis from which the oddities are perceived. In this way, humor tests the like-mindedness of a social group (see e.g. Knuuttila 1992). For example, Bergson (1913) argues that this unifying aspect of humor is a positive attribute, as he assumes that a society always represents life-affirmative values. Fromm, however, would be critical towards this idea, as in his view the whole society can

actually be insane or sick (Fromm 1955). If humor is an expression of the typical ways we are related to others, then humor, too, can reflect questionable attitudes – this aspect has to be analyzed in relation to the prevailing social character. So, even if everyone is laughing with you, there can be something wrong with the laughter on a deeper level. Following Fromm, a merely adapting to a social group is not enough, as we have to question the quality of this relatedness in relation to humanistic values.⁹

As becomes clear, humor has ethical implications, but these are not always recognized in our everyday thinking. Instead, there is a common tendency to claim that laughter and humor belong to the sphere of the non-serious and therefore cannot have any serious consequences (see Mulkay 1988), and even if there are some serious effects, they are basically always good and positive (see Billig 2005). These common beliefs – which can be found among both humor theorists and laymen – can be questioned when observing, say, how popular xenophobic humor is (see Todd 2015). As theorists have observed, we laugh at foreigners and strangers (e.g. Critchley 2004). The theoretical implication is that when strangeness is experienced as ridiculous, the *status quo* is strengthened by laughter, and in this aspect humor both includes and excludes at the same time (e.g. Kotthoff 2006; Mulkay 1988). Fromm, then, would ask what kind of community is reinforced by humor and laughter, and what the basic passions and values are by which humor is connected. More generally, Fromm strongly argues that a mere adaptation to the social setting is not enough; if a community expresses questionable attitudes and thoughts in relation to what can be called humanistic values (Fromm 1955; see also Fromm 1962), the claimed positivity of humor and laughter can be easily questioned. In the next chapter, I will clarify and strengthen this claim by analyzing how Fromm's character typology can be applied to humor research.

3 *Humor and character*

The guiding premise is that an individual's sense of humor is a social construction because the whole character is formed in relation to others. The basic insight, that humor is a social phenomenon, is not precisely a new idea: for example, Aristotle discusses the significance of laughter in social relationships. The Stageirian presents an idea about the sense of humor as a social virtue, and states that there are some people who exaggerate laughter, others who are appropriately tactful, and then there are those who are too negative about laughter. Those who exaggerate laughter, 'buffoons' as they are called in the English translation, are people who will not spare anyone or anything when trying to trigger laughter. Those who are negative about laughter, then, are people who get offended about anything and are socially hopeless grumpies. (Aristotle, Ni-

⁹ Kirsh and Kuiper (2003) discuss sense of humor in relation to individualism and relatedness, but their concept of relatedness does not refer to the existential need like Fromm describes it; instead, relatedness is an aspect of personality in contrast to individualism. They evaluate positive and negative aspects of sense of humor in relation to previous, not in relation to humanistic values as I suggest here.

comachean Ethics 1128a8-15.) The buffoon might be, say, completely indifferent to the feelings of the audience, and he keeps joking about everything regardless of whether his humorous insights are tasteless or immoral. On the other hand, the grumpies preach that every kind of joking is insulting and that they will not stand for any kind of mocking. Now, the tactful jokers will respect the audience, and they try to share their witty remarks in the right place and right time. This is the virtuous element of humor for Aristotle.

In Aristotle's discussion of humor, there is already a seed of the thought that the content of a joke is only of secondary importance when evaluating humor; more interesting and important is how humor constructs social relationships. Thus, the very same joke can be appropriate in one social setting, and highly questionable in another. Following Fromm, the central question is: what is the motivation behind the humor and laughter? To understand how different kinds of personalities relate to humor, it is necessary to go to the roots of human thoughts and actions, and to do this, Fromm's character typology offers a fruitful grounding from which to understand the reasons and passions behind humor. To illustrate this, I briefly discuss three general character orientations which can be used to demonstrate three different ways to relate to humor. Naturally, Fromm's character typology is much more complex, but the broad discussion of different character orientations is beyond the scope of this article, and the three chosen character types are sufficient for the basic idea: that humor is dependent on the total character. It should be mentioned that for Fromm, every human being is a unique individual, and that there is an endless number of different combinations of character traits. That said, Fromm is always interested in shared ways of relating to the world, which he analyzes through the concept of social character. In relation to this, the dominant trait or striving of an individual and a society (see e.g. Fromm 1941; 1973) is to be analyzed. The discussion, obviously, deals with certain ideal types. Generally, Fromm distinguishes between productive¹⁰ and nonproductive ways of relating to others. Here, I will discuss two nonproductive orientations and one productive orientation.¹¹ The basic idea, as Fromm formulates it, is that every individual acts "according to his passions, his meanest and his noblest, and is often willing—and able—to risk his self-interest, his fortune, his freedom and his life in the pursuit of love, truth, and integrity—or for hate, greed, sadism, and destructiveness." (Fromm 1973: 150) Humor, too, reflects these basic attitudes, but not always in a straightforward manner nor consciously.

In the 1940s, Fromm described a general character type whose guiding principle is what Fromm calls a *marketing orientation*. This way of relating to oneself, the world and to others is based on a worldview through which everything and everyone is evaluated as commodities. For this kind of character, eve-

¹⁰ Not to be confused with the modern definition of producing as many goods and services as possible. Productivity, for Fromm, means an active and loving way of relating to others, the world, and oneself (see e.g. Fromm and Maccoby 1970: 94).

¹¹ Fromm's choice of terms can be criticized (see Maccoby 2014), but my aim is to discuss the general idea rather than the details of his character theory, and therefore I will use the same terms as Fromm, as is customary among Fromm researchers.

rything is up for sale or trade, including personal relationships and smiles, and this kind of personality understands even human relationships on the basis of exchange value. People of this type are extremely flexible. Instead having a clear core, Fromm argues, there is a lack of permanency, as everything is sellable in the terms of the prevailing market system. (Fromm 1947: 50–57.) I add that for this kind of character, humor is also based on the idea of flexibility and on the demands of the current situation. For him, jokes and laughter are commodities to be exchanged, and he considers humor to be a tool for selling his personality or his products. The very general idea of ‘humor sells’ reflects the above described tendency in everyday life, and there are studies which suggest that humor makes one more attractive in romantic contexts (see Wilbur 2011). It has been noted that a male might attempt to make a female laugh because this laughter is considered to be a signal of her liking (Hall 2015).

Sadistic character, on the other hand, is guided by the striving for control and power. Sadistic personalities do not necessarily want to inflict pain but are rather interested in transforming other human beings into things that can be handled and manipulated according to his or her own wishes (Fromm 1973: 488). This idea fits well with the claim that we laugh when we feel ourselves superior to others. This can be manifested in a sudden reaction (as Thomas Hobbes [1651] classically describes laughter), or it may be a deliberate attempt to subjugate others via ridiculing and shaming in the form of humor. If something or someone is ridiculous, it means – for a sadistic personality – that the object of laughter is worthless at least in some respect. This general sadistic tendency, connecting ridiculousness with worthlessness, is a relatively general trait among certain groups, and even though this article lacks empirical data on the subject matter, this hypothesis can be verified by empirical studies. The guiding principle in sadism, as Fromm writes, is “the passion for unrestricted power over another sentient being.” (Fromm 1973: 38) I suggest cruel mockery against, say, minorities fits well within this framework.

The most humane way to relate to others and to oneself, is through what Fromm calls a *productive character orientation*. It refers to “a fundamental attitude, a mode of relatedness in all realms of human experience” (Fromm and Maccoby 1970: 94), or in a more poetic form, this type of personality “gives soul to that which surrounds him. The productive person gives birth to his own faculties and gives life to persons and to things.” (Fromm and Maccoby 1970: 94) This type of character, then, does not base his humor on selfishness but rather he is sensitive to himself and to others even in his laughter. As Fromm describes, “What matters in the productive attitude is not its particular object, which may be people, nature, or things, but rather the whole approach. The productive orientation is rooted in the love of life (biophilia). It is *being*, not *having*.” (Fromm and Maccoby 1970: 94) In my interpretation, humor, for this type of personality, is not a tool for anything, but an expression of productive relatedness. Humor is a joyful acknowledgement of categorical anomalies but not in the sense that others are considered to be ridiculous *and* worthless; instead the plurality, commonalities and differences between people can be considered as a

reminder of the total humanity and its versatile nature. In Fromm's view, the totality of human existence is an absurdity (Fromm 1990: 77) and we are freaks of the universe (Fromm 1947: 28), and the productive character reflects this insight in his humor. He or she accepts the totality of the human condition, and understands that every individual shares the basic paradox of humanity. Life may be an absurdity but at least we are all in the same boat; so, humor and laughter are not tools of separation, but sparkling moments of joyful relatedness and aspects of sharing.

According to Maccoby, Fromm believed that the sense of humor is an emotional equivalent to a person's cognitive sense of reality (Maccoby 2009: 143). This means that the way we are related to the world has crucial effects on our sense of humor, and reciprocally, the sense of humor reflects the way we relate. Fromm stresses that through one's life, one has to answer the question of how to overcome separateness and suffering; how to find a connection with others and with nature. The question is always the same even though the answers might differ. Fromm states that one has to give the answer with his total personality, that is, as a human being "who thinks and dreams, who sleeps and eats, who cries and laughs". (Fromm 1961: 6.)

One challenge for humor research is that these underlying tendencies cannot be found just on the basis of one joke. All of the above described personalities can laugh at the very same joke, but for different reasons. Let us have an example:

Horrible news spread out in a Galician village: someone had brutally murdered a Christian girl. The local Jewish community were worried that the finger of blame would once again be pointed at them, and there was a scent of coming massacre in the air. Jews gathered into a *shul*¹² to discuss whether they should try to run, conciliate, or organize some kind of defensive fight. In the middle of the debate, David ran in and shouted:

- Brothers, I have good news! The slaughtered girl was a Jew after all!¹³

A non-Jewish sadistic personality might laugh at this joke as it portrays Jews as a weak group who even rejoice in the death of one of their own. In this aspect, the joke can strengthen questionable racist and anti-Semitic attitudes. Then again, a marketing personality might find this joke funny because others around him find it funny; or because he thinks that he can use it for his personal benefit at some occasion. This type of personality is not necessarily concerned with the content of a joke, and his reaction to the joke is dependent on the possible personal gains and losses the joke offers in different situations.

A productive character could find the joke both horrible and funny; the joke recalls the history of mistreatment and suffering of Jewish populations throughout millennia, as well as the general fear of the predicted horrors. In this, the joke reflects the relationship between Jews and the majority popula-

¹² 'A school' in Yiddish; the term often refers to a synagogue or a specific study area in a synagogue (Seppälä 2012: 118).

¹³ I have translated this joke from a book by Serafim Seppälä (2012: 96), who is a Finnish orthodox monk, and who works as a professor of theology in the University of Eastern Finland.

tion: Jews have always been hunted and treated as scapegoats, and they are seen as responsible for many unpalatable things. In this framework, when a Christian individual is found murdered, the mob is going to demand the harshest sentence possible; but if the deceased is a Jew, there probably will not be any additional bloodshed. This is a description of power relations, and in this light David's relief is understandable. In the same moment, however, the joke snipes at the common human tendency; how we so easily forget empathy in the face of a tragedy (someone, in any case, has been murdered) if we can save our own skin. The perspective gets twisted and the very essence of the tragedy dismissed. For a productive character, the joke is not a tool for anything. Instead, it reflects both awful and ridiculous sides of humanity, and offers something to contemplate.

One should keep in mind that we are dealing with generalizations here. From time to time, Fromm gives strong formulations about how character is a human being's destiny as it "determines action, as well as thoughts and ideas" (Fromm 1962: 81), and also how an individual's life is "determined by society" (Fromm 1992a: 17), but these observations should be interpreted in a charitable way. Fromm's general social theory is not fixed but flexible as societies and social characters are able to change. For him, every individual is a unique person, and the relationship between an individual and a society is reciprocal: "*Society is nothing but living, concrete individuals, and the individual can live only as a social human being.*" (Fromm 1992a: 58) Fromm's general claim, then, is that we are molded in social settings, but not in one overreaching uniform manner; there is room for differences between personalities. That said, there are certain general tendencies which have a strong influence on everyone's total character. In this sense, the prevailing society has a deep impact upon our thinking, as well as how we feel and what we want. This collective economic-political-cultural setting is to be noticed in humor research also, and thus humor has to be analyzed alongside with the totality of humanity and not, say, as an isolated, accidental trait.

The discussion above makes it possible to realize the significance of the concept of social character for humor research. First, it opens up the dynamic nature of humor. Humor is based on contradictions, and the essential question is: what are these contradictions in a precise historical moment, and what kind of passions do we have that relate to them? With this in mind, it is possible to understand why different kinds of humor studies appear to offer contradictory results, as described above; some claim that humor is a sign of superiority, others argue that humor is a defense mechanism; according to some humor is a conservative power, and to others a revolutionary force. The general problem with these claims is that they offer universal, static answers to a dynamic question. Instead, humor should be analyzed via the way Fromm examines total humanity, and how the central problem of relatedness is the same for all, but the answers vary from one historical period to another. The results offered by various kinds of humor research are not necessarily wrong, but the way they are presented is often insensitive to or disconnected from the general human condition. Following Fromm's social philosophical and psychological premises,

it should be noted that humor research is, or should be, always connected to philosophical anthropology, that is, to the question of what it means to be a human being.

4 The Dynamic Nature of Humor

As it is described above, my attempt to understand humor in relation to the total character matrix resembles certain earlier humor studies, and also develops them. My claim is that character is a central factor for humor research, and the Frommian position formulated here can explain many different ways in which people relate to the contents and the form or style of humor. Naturally, I do not claim that empirical research based on Fromm's character typology is as easy as, say, the type of clinical humor studies which focus on counting the frequency of laughter in different situations, or calculating how often a certain word is mentioned in different kinds of jokes. Scientific inquiries, however, cannot be paralyzed by the prospected difficulties of research. It is possible to conduct an empirical research on humor which respects Fromm's general ideas. Even though so far Frommian humor studies have been basically non-existent, there have been pioneers who have conducted deep humor research, although not necessarily focusing on Fromm's character typology.

For instance, Kuipers has conducted empirical studies about jokes in the Netherlands and the United States, and her results have been intriguing: highly educated Dutch people have a negative attitude towards joking in principle. They consider jokes as tasteless, vulgar and as "too easy". In other social classes, people relate to joking in a more accepting manner. (Kuipers 2006: 15-16, 47-48.) Interestingly, she notes that "different social groups have different criteria for good and bad humor, which means that they joke not only about different subjects, but also in different ways. These standards are related more to style than to content, and they are linked with broader communication styles, taste cultures, and notions of personhood." (Kuipers 2008: 381; Kuipers 2006)¹⁴

Of course, Aristotle (Nicomachean Ethics: 4.8., 1128a21-25) and Sigmund Freud (1905: 100) have noted the differences in senses of humor between different classes. Aristotle mentions how educated men and uneducated men enjoy a different kind of joking, and a similar observation was made by Freud about the common folk and civilized people. Fromm himself says in one of his earlier texts that the upper-class bourgeoisie of the wine cellars tell jokes in a different style than the lower-class bourgeoisie of the beer halls (Fromm 1932: 186). Kuipers' research makes these kinds of singular observations even more plausible.

Even though Kuipers focuses specifically on jokes, her results are applicable to wider humor studies.¹⁵ Kuipers demonstrates how a person's attitude towards humor is closely related to that person's social environment. In this

¹⁴ In Kuipers' discussion the goodness and badness of humor is related to the quality of funniness, that is, if humor happens to be amusing or not; they are not primarily ethical qualities.

¹⁵ Of course, there also are possible shortcomings. As Kuipers admits, a questionnaire might not be the perfect tool with which to study jokes (Kuipers 2006: 152)

sense, the understanding of what is funny – roughly, the sense of humor – is socially shared, and often consistent with the sense of humor of others of the same social standing. Kuipers describes how humor, on the one hand, brings people closer together, but on the other hand, can be a means of separation. According to Kuipers, different attitudes towards humor also underline the differences between people. (Kuipers 2006: 1, 14.)

Kuipers brings the concept of the sense of humor into focus in that it does not refer only to an individual relation to the topic or substance of humor, but also to the form of humor. The members of a group may consider jokes as a category a poor form of humor – joking is not funny, it is just low-minded and cheap, regardless of the content or substance of the joke. In regard to this social sense of humor, for them telling and listening to jokes is not meaningful in any sense.

Following Fromm, we can take a step further than the previous observations. He writes that different ways of simple data collection, like opinion polls, can be useful in some respects but they are not the right tools for understanding the phenomenon behind the polls in a profound manner. Fromm's interest lies in the forces that operate underneath the surface of the subject matter. (Fromm 1994: 147) Fromm himself conducted empirical studies, "extended projective questionnaires" (Fromm 1981: 35), in which he used his psychoanalytical experience to interpret the results. He did not settle just for the answers given to singular questions but tried to understand what can be found beyond the mere opinions of people: "An opinion in itself is nothing but the acceptance of a thought pattern shared by the society in general (...) (O)nly those opinions constitute powerful motivations for action which are rooted in the character structure of a person." (Fromm and Maccoby 1970: 29.) In relation to this, it is important to try to understand what kind of convictions can be interpreted around humor. Thus, in humor research it is not enough just to collect data; Fromm's demand is that the results have to be understood in a deep way. If a person laughs at one sexist joke, it does not mean that he is necessarily a chauvinist; singular jokes cannot determine a whole personality. However, this does not mean that jokes are an impossible object to study in relation to social character. They can be interpreted as important clues. Analogously, Fromm writes:

To give a simple example for the application of the interpretative method: to the question "Which men in history do you admire most?" some answered "Alexander the Great, Nero, Marx, and Lenin," while others answered "Socrates, Pasteur, Kant, Marx, and Lenin." While in the conventional questionnaire, "Marx and Lenin" would be treated as identical in both answers, according to the interpretative method, "Marx and Lenin" have an entirely different meaning in each of these two answers. In the first they were representatives of power and/or military force, in the second, benefactors of the human race. (Fromm and Maccoby 1970: 32–33.)

The correctness of the previous interpretation is not essential here, nor do I demand that one should accept the metaphysical premises of psychoanalysis to do deep humor research. Instead, I propose that we should embrace Fromm's general idea about research methods. Humor, I suggest, should be examined and understood alongside the total core of human character. This, of course, is

harder than collecting simple data, and it demands more than just a superficial analysis of the results. Nevertheless, the answers are richer and more revealing if one accepts the Frommian approach to scientific research. This kind of study helps to understand how, for instance, sadistic tendencies can be hidden behind the veil of humor. As Fromm illustrates: “Mental sadism may be disguised in many seemingly harmless ways: a question, a smile, a confusing remark” (Fromm 1973: 477), and this kind of cruelty and wish to harm others mentally needs only “the right word or the right gesture to embarrass or humiliate another in this innocent¹⁶ way.” (Fromm 1973: 477). Fromm adds that sadistic character traits “can never be understood if one isolates them from the character structure. They are part of a syndrome that has to be understood as a whole.” (Fromm 1973: 488).

Even though humor itself is a dynamic phenomenon and the interpretations of, say, jokes are dependent on the concrete situation, the idea of social character offers a basis for understanding the general traits of humor. Fromm’s theoretical works open up the possibility that despite the liquid nature of humor, there is continuity in the ways how both individuals and societies react and relate to humor; and what kind of relationships are constructed via humor. Thus, in a unique historical moment, the social significance of humor can be grasped. At this point, it is clear that a mere moment of shared funniness is not enough to conclude that humor is a positive phenomenon. Even if laughter is claimed to foster one’s health (see Berk et al. 2001), or to make one a better learner (see Shatz and LoSchiavo 2006), or to bring people together (see Provine 2000), they are only secondary values. If humor is based on oppression and malignant hatred, and the aim is to, say, spread racist attitudes via humor, then healthiness and togetherness are of little worth. Fromm’s demand would be that we have to analyze the basic attitudes and values from which humor stems and to what ideals it is connected. Humor clearly constructs relationships but we have to be able to evaluate these relationships from some perspective – in a Frommian framework, a humanistic perspective. This demand also concerns humor research.

5 Discussion

Erich Fromm is a versatile thinker interested in the totality of human existence. His empirically inspired social criticism also makes him an ethical thinker as he tries to discover how human life can be lived in its fullest and most authentic way. This leads him to study the relationship between an individual and a society, and the various ways of how a productive life could be lived. Even though left aside from the above discussion, through his written works Fromm analyses economic and religious matters, ponders the revolutionary possibilities of Zen meditation, opens up ideas about paradoxical logic, discusses the possibilities of new socialism, and ponders art as a humane power – that is, the total humanity. He also mentions how humor is an important subject matter when

¹⁶ *Spuriously innocent*, I would add.

we are trying to understand our social lives, but Fromm never studied this aspect of humanity systematically. Thus, my research fills a gap among Fromm research as well as opens up a new branch for humor research.

The total process is reciprocal. We need to understand what it means to be human to understand humor, but at the same time, understanding humor helps to deepen our views about humanity. In this process, the significance of Fromm's critical thinking is apparent. I have presented some general guidelines on how to understand humor in the light of Fromm's social critical thinking and claimed that it opens fruitful possibilities for empirical research on humor. However, the detailed formulations of, for example, questionnaires and other details of the deep empirical research are left for later articles.

Fromm's socio-psychological theories and philosophical insights have been basically unnoted in the field of humor research until now. My general argument is that Fromm's radical humanism, and the concept of social character in particular, fits together with many existing approaches to humor, and the concept can be used to further develop these approaches. In addition, the concept of social character helps us to understand humor's inherently social nature. Fromm's scientific position combines sociological, philosophical and psychological thinking, and it can be empirically tested. Of course, these kinds of empirical studies demand much, but his position opens fruitful new perspectives on humor and society.

I suggest that Fromm's theoretical works can be applied to humor research in a productive manner, and that existing humor research encourages more detailed and accurate research in the light of Fromm's concept of social character. As discussed, there are numerous joint points in which Fromm's ideas and humor studies are already close to each other. To develop these insights further, the concept of social character plays a central role, and it can be applied in order to understand both the positive and the murkier sides of humor. The study of humor and social character makes it possible to understand how there is continuity in a dynamic phenomenon; humor is not accidental even though it is dynamic by its nature.

All this leaves tremendous opportunities for later Frommian humor research. For instance, it should be analyzed in detail how humor is related to different kinds of character orientations. Also, Fromm's character typology can be further developed, and for this the analysis of contemporary humor is important. For example, Rainer Funk's studies on post-modern character, or ego-oriented character (see Funk 2005; 2006) can be used to understand the post-modern sense of humor. Also, the recent discussion about meta-modernism and a meta-modern character (see Vermeulen and van der Akker 2010) opens up a possibility to understand recent traits in humor, and to what kind of passions this humor is related. That said, in this article my purpose has been to open up a new idea for both Fromm and humor research, and to offer a new theoretical tool to understand humor. The emphasis has been on certain general insights by Fromm. Humor has to be analyzed alongside humanity as a totality, and for

this kind of study, Fromm offers an interesting and fruitful background – in a both socially critical and empirically inspired way.

REFERENCES

- Aristotle. 1970. *The Ethics of Aristotle: the Nichomachean Ethics Translated*. Trans. J. A. K. Thomson. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Bakhtin, M. 1984. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. H. Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Bergson, H. 1913/1899. *Laughter. An essay on the meaning of the comic*. Trans. Cloudesley Brereton & Fred Rothwell. New York: The Macmillan Company.
- Berk, L. S., Felten, D. L., Tan, S. A, Bittman, B. B. and Westengard, J. 2001. Modulation of Neuroimmune Parameters During the Eustress of Humor-Associated Mirthful Laughter. In *Alternative Therapies*, March 2001, Vol. 7, No. 2. 62-76.
- Billig, M. 2005 *Laughter and Ridicule. Towards a Social Critique of Humour*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Bourdieu, P. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Critchley, S. 2004. *On Humour*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Durkin, K. 2014. *The Radical Humanism of Erich Fromm*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
- Freud, S. 1905/1968a. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. Trans. James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press.
- Freud, S. 1927/1968b. Humour. In *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XXI (1927-1931). Trans. James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press. 159-166.
- Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis.
- Fromm, E. 1932. Psychoanalytic Characterology and its Relevance for Social Psychology. In E. Fromm (1991) *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis*. New York: Henry Holt and Company. 163-187
- Fromm, E. 1941/1994. *Escape From Freedom*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Fromm, E. 1947/2003. *Man for Himself. An inquiry into the psychology of ethics*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Fromm, E. 1948/1955. Sex and Character. The Kinsey Report Viewed from the Standpoint of Psychoanalysis. In J. Himmelhoch and S. Fava (Eds.) *Sexual Behavior in American Society*. New York: Norton, 1955. pp. 301 – 311.
- Fromm, E. 1955/1990. *The Sane Society*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Fromm, Erich 1961/2002. The Humanistic Concept of Mental Health. In *Fromm Forum* 6/2002, Tübingen, International Erich Fromm Society, 3-7.
- Fromm, E. 1962. *Beyond the Chains of Illusions: My Encounter with Marx and Freud*. New York: Open Road / Integrated Media. e-book, available from iTunes Store.

- Fromm, E. 1963/2004. *The Dogma of Christ. And other essays on religion, psychology and culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Fromm, E. 1973. *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*. New York: Open Road / Integrated Media. e-book, available from iTunes Store.
- Fromm, E. 1976. *To Have or To Be?* New York: Open Road / Integrated Media. e-book, available from iTunes Store.
- Fromm, E. 1981. *On Disobedience and Other Essays*. New York: The Seabury Press.
- Fromm, E. 1984. *The Working Class in Weimar Germany: A Psychological and Sociological Study*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Fromm, E. 1990. *The Revision of Psychoanalysis*. Boulder/San Francisco/Oxford: Westview Press.
- Fromm, E. 1991/2010. *The Pathology of Normalcy*. New York: AMHF.
- Fromm, E. 1992a/2010. *Beyond Freud. From Individual to Social Psychoanalysis*. New York: AMHF.
- Fromm, E. 1992b/1994. *On Being Human*. New York: Continuum.
- Fromm, E. 1994/1997. *Love, Sexuality, and Matriarchy. About Gender*. Ed. R. Funk. New York: Fromm International Publishing Corporation.
- Fromm, E. and Maccoby, M. 1970. *Social Character in a Mexican Village: a sociopsychanalytic study*. e-book, available from iTunes Store. New York: Open Road.
- Funk, R. 1982. *Erich Fromm: The Courage to be Human*. Trans. Michael Shaw. New York: Continuum.
- Funk, R. 2005. *Ich und Wir. Psychoanalyse des postmodernen Menschen*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag.
- Funk, R. 2006. The Psychodynamics of the Postmodern „I-am-me“ Orientation. In *Fromm Forum* 10/2006. Tübingen: International Erich Fromm Society. 52–61.
- Funk, R. and McLaughlin, N. 2015. Introduction. In R. Funk and N. McLaughlin (eds.) *Towards a Human Science. The Relevance of Erich Fromm for Today*. Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag. 9–29.
- Gouin, R. 2004. What's So Funny? Humor in women's accounts of their involvement of social action. *Qualitative Research* 4 (1): 25–44.
- Gruner, C. R. 2000. *The Game of Humor. A Comprehensive Theory of Why We Laugh*. New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers.
- Hall, J. A. 2015. Sexual Selection and Humor in Courtship: A Case for Warmth and Extroversion. In *Evolutionary Psychology* 2015: 1-10. Retrieved from: <http://evp.sagepub.com/content/13/3/1474704915598918.full.pdf+html> Accessed 13th April 2016.
- Hobbes, T. 1651/1962. *Leviathan: On the matter, forme and power of a commonwealth ecclesiasticall and civil*. New York: Collier Books.
- Jay, M. 1973. *The Dialectical Imagination. A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923-1950*. Boston/Toronto: Little, Brown and Company.

- Kirsh, G. A. and Kuiper N. A. 2003. Positive and negative aspects of sense of humor: Associations with the constructs of individualism and relatedness. *HUMOR* 16-1, 33–62.
- Knuuttila, S. 1992. *Kansanhuumorin mieli. Kaskut maailmankuovan aineksena*. Jyväskylä: SKS.
- Kotthoff, H. Gender and humor: The state of art. *Journal of Pragmatics* 38 (1): 4–25.
- Kuipers, G. 2006. *Good Humor, Bad Taste: A Sociology of the Joke*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Kuipers, G. 2008. The sociology of humor. In V. Raskin (ed.) *Primer of Humor Research*, 361–398. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Lewis, P. 1997. Debate: Humor and political correctness. *HUMOR* 10 (4): 453–513.
- Lockyer, S. and Pickering, M. 2005. *Beyond the Joke: The Limits of Humour*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Maccoby, M. 2002. Toward a Science of Social Character. *International Forum of Psychoanalysis* 11. 33–44.
- Maccoby, M. 2009. Fromm Didn't Want to be a Frommian. In R. Funk (ed.) 2009 *The Clinical Erich Fromm. Personal Accounts and Papers on Therapeutic Technique*. Amsterdam, Rodopi. 141–143.
- Maccoby, M. 2014. Building on Erich Fromm's scientific contributions. In *Fromm Forum* 18/2014. Tübingen, Germany: International Erich Fromm Society. 7–15.
- Meisenhelder, T. 2006. From character to habitus in sociology. *The Social Science Journal* 43 (1): 55–66.
- Morreall, J. 2012. Philosophy of Humor. In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved from: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/humor/> Accessed 1st April 2016.
- Mulkay, M. 1988. *On Humour. Its Nature and Its Place in Modern Society*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Provine, R. R. 2000. *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation*. New York: Viking.
- Robinson, D. and Smith-Lovin, L. 2001. Getting a laugh: Gender, status, and humor in task discussions. *Social Forces* 80 (1): 123–158.
- Ruch, W. 1998. Foreword and overview. Sense of humor: A new look at an old concept. In W. Ruch (ed.) *The Sense of Humor. Explorations of a Personality Characteristic*. Berlin/New York, Mouton de Gruyter.
- Scott, J. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. Yale: Yale University Press.
- Shatz, M. A. and LoSchiavo, F. M. 2006. Bringing Life to Online Instruction with Humor. In *Radical Pedagogy* Vol. 8, Issue 2. Fall 2006.
- Seppälä, S. 2012. *Missä on liikaa, sieltä puuttuu jotakin. Juutalaisen huumorin maailma*. Helsinki: Kirjapaja.
- Speier, H. 1998. Wit and politics: An essay on laughter and power. Trans. R. Jackall. *American Journal of Sociology* 103 (5): 1352–1401.
- Todd, E. 2015. *Who is Charlie? Xenophobia and the New Middle Class*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Vermeulen, T. and van der Akker, R. 2010. Notes on metamodernism. *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, nov. 2010. Available at:
<http://www.aestheticsandculture.net/index.php/jac/article/view/5677>
Accessed 1st April 2016.
- Wilbur, C. J. 2011. Humor in Romantic Contexts: Do Men Participate and Women Evaluate? In *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* July 2011 vol. 37, no. 7, 918–929.
- Zijderveld, A. 1982. *Reality in a Looking-glass: Rationality through an Analysis of Traditional Folly*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

II

LAUGHING AT ONESELF: ON THE NEW SOCIAL CHARACTER

by

Hietalahti, J.

Studies in Social & Political Thought Volume 2 / Summer 2015.
Special issue: Pathologies of Recognition, 2015, 116–131.

Reproduced with permission by the publisher.

6. Laughing at Oneself: On the New Social Character

by Jarno Hietalahti

Man goes to doctor. Says he's depressed. Says life seems harsh and cruel. Says he feels all alone in a threatening world where what lies ahead is vague and uncertain. Doctor says, 'Treatment is simple. Great clown Pagliacci is in town tonight. Go and see him. That should pick you up.' Man bursts into tears. Says,

*'But doctor... I am Pagliacci.'*¹

Introduction

This article discusses the philosophy of humor, with a focus on the phenomenon of laughing at oneself. The particular aim of this paper is to show that laughing at oneself is not as straightforwardly good or positive a matter as philosophers of humor have stated. I examine this cultural phenomenon in the light of Erich Fromm's thinking. In his written works Fromm is fascinated by the relationship between an individual and a society, as for example Gerhard Knapp (1989, 44) and Rainer Funk (2014, xiv) emphasize. I propose that the study of humor, in general, is a pertinent field in which to explore this duality: we all have a unique sense of humor, and still humor is typically shared. In the spirit of the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory, in this article I use philosophical concepts to analyze cultural phenomena. As mentioned above, the foremost interest lies in the case of laughing at oneself and the social level meaning of this tendency.

For conceptual clarity, in this article laughter refers to the laughter triggered by humor instead of, say, laughter resulting from nervousness. Humor is an umbrella concept for different kinds of amusing occasions. It covers, for instance, irony, satire, farce, the comic, and so forth. Of course, there are differences between various humorous genres, but examining those is a subject for another paper.

This article follows two traditional theories of humor: *Incongruity Theory*, and *Superiority Theory*. According to the Incongruity Theory, humor occurs when there is a conflict between our conceptions of or expectations about a situation, and the perceived reality of that situation. Another way of

putting the theory is that in humor, there is an incongruity between cultural categorizations. The Incongruity Theory also states that when we find something funny, we find it funny only in relation to something else, and nothing is funny in and of itself. In contrast, the Superiority Theory states that we laugh when we feel ourselves superior in a certain way to others, namely the object(s) of our amusement (cf. Hurley et al 2011; Critchley 2004; Attardo 2008). So, I add, this is mainly an empirical point: every so often, when we laugh, we have observed some kind of flaw or fault or inferiority of the object we consider ridiculous. This theory does not withstand critical analytical examination, as will be shown below.

First, I will briefly clarify the phenomenon of laughing at oneself and the social demand for this trait. After that, I bring forth certain philosophical observations about self-ridiculing and highlight possible shortcomings of laughing at oneself. Then, I demonstrate why and how the presumed value of self-ridiculing is a problematic notion. The basic claim is that the ideal of self-irony is good, but by and large, a good idea has gone wrong in the contemporary Western world. Generally speaking, this article is written to point out that laughing at oneself is connected to recognition (*Anerkennung*), and that self-ridiculing can be a form of social pathology as well.

Humor can also be understood as a tool for gaining recognition. If I can make others laugh, I am recognized as a funny person. In everyday life, this is positive. Laughter, in a sense, brings people together; it is a kind of social glue. We tend to laugh in a similar manner in similar occasions, at least to a certain amount. Even though each one of us appears to have a unique sense of humor, humor is a widely shared phenomenon. Despite this general positive aspect of humor, in this paper I argue that there are also darker sides of humor. Humor can, for example, separate people. My claim is that there are at least two problems with laughing at oneself: 1) It is not clear what this self is which we laugh at. For this reason, the philosophy of self needs conceptual clarification if we are to understand what self-ridiculing actually means, and 2) self-ridiculing is not always a (morally) good thing.

1 Laughing at Oneself and the Social Character

Our culture is sympathetic to self-ridiculing. Professional critics always remember to mention if, say, a stand-up comedian or a cartoon laughs at everything – and at themselves. The latter is typically emphasized in a favorable tone. It seems to be that, to succeed in being funny, a comedian needs to mock herself as well as others. If she scorns just others, perhaps certain minorities, her humor is easily considered to be appalling. We tend to disapprove if some ill-mannered jester tells purely racist jokes (and is quite

serious about them).

It is interesting that when a member of a minority makes a joke about her own group, the situation alters. For example, it is an altogether different case if a white male who supports National Socialism tells a joke about simpleminded black people, and if the storyteller herself is an African American. Also, every so often self-ridiculing is the best way to raise laughter – this is what stand-up comedians do from night to night. So, the basic cultural assumption is that laughing at ourselves is morally more acceptable and maybe even funnier than laughing at others.

In Western culture we need to show to others that we are capable of laughing at ourselves. There are several television shows that demonstrate this: for instance, roasting is popular in the United States, and also conquering Europe at a good pace. In a roast, an individual – typically a celebrity – is insulted and mocked by others. A presupposition is that the roastee should not be offended by the criticism but to take it all with a smile or laughter. To be roasted might even be considered as an honor. And this phenomenon is not just for celebrities. In a similar manner, as we live in the age of viral videos, people often upload their most humiliating clips to the internet. The message is that we are able to show the ridiculous sides of ourselves in public, and as a consequence, we do not take ourselves too seriously. As it happens, ‘The Funniest Home Videos’ is a popular format in television.

This trait of laughing at ourselves is also present in interactions beyond television or the internet. We make little jokes about our professions, our bodily features, our political thinking in everyday social gatherings; we are able to laugh when we stumble on the stairs in the dark, and so on. The capability of self-ridiculing and the ability to laugh at our own flaws can be considered as a socially recognized attribute.

Erich Fromm describes the meaning of this kind of social attitude with the concept of *social character*. The social character is a part of our character structure, and it explains how we relate to society and to other individuals. Essentially, social character makes people *want to do what they have to do* (cf. Fromm 1994, 275–296). Fromm writes:

I have always had this concept of the social character, by which I mean that human energy is one of the raw materials which go into the social process, but in a specific form of character traits which are molded by the conditions of the economic and social structure of a given society. (Fromm 2000, 27)

Fromm explains that the social character is ‘*the nucleus of the character*

structure which is shared by most members of the same culture' (Fromm 2006, 62). This character is shaped by, among other things, family, school and spare time. In general, social character describes how a group of people adapts to the prevailing economic, social, and cultural conditions. Of course, as conditions change through decades and centuries, the socio-economic demands alter. In short, social character is in direct relation to succeeding in a certain society (cf. Fromm 1994, 275–296).

Fromm's idea about the marketing-orientated character type appears to be relevant today, even though he described it in 1947. This character orientation is a combination of flexibility and independence. The core of the marketing personality is to be able to adapt to changing situations, and because of that, this personality lacks a strong center, which can be seen as disloyalty and even insincerity (cf. Fromm 2003, 49–60). Fromm's co-worker Michael Maccoby has developed Fromm's idea about this personality type and applied it to the modern day. According to Maccoby, this personality type predominates today in the form of the new social character type, which he calls the *interactive social character* (Maccoby 2014, 11).

Maccoby describes the new social character as follows:

At best, the interactive social character is both independent and collaborative. Interactives expect continual change. But they are not loyal to companies, and do not expect companies to be loyal to them. They are adept at forming relationships, but also at dissolving them. They have learned to adapt their personalities, their self-presentation, to different situations and audiences. (Maccoby 2014, 13)

The contemporary social demand to be able to laugh at oneself fits within this description. We must be flexible and alter ourselves as the situation dictates. As such, laughing at oneself signals that I do not take myself too seriously and am always able to perceive myself from a new perspective. This means that my profession, political thoughts or bodily features do not define me. For the interactives, as Maccoby calls this trait, it is easy to laugh at oneself: they do not commit themselves to anything nor does any single feature define them thoroughly. Someone with this kind of character finds it easy to laugh at any area of her life as laughing at those areas does not call into question her whole being. Rather, laughing at herself signals to others that she is mentally strong and self-confident. Neither her own nor others' laughter can hurt her. Here, having an ironical stance towards life can be interpreted as being an asset.

At a general level, social character is related to successful living. Still,

it does not guarantee that an individual will live a happy or productive² life, states Fromm. According to him, instead of just adapting to the social demands, we need to, among other things, relate to others and be rooted somewhere. Another central theme is that we have a need for an identity. Fromm stresses:

We have to be able to say 'I'. If we can't say 'I' we are crazy (...)
Man today is confronted with the possibility of developing the sense of 'I' but that means that he has developed his own creativity, his own productivity, he has to be he, he has to sense himself, experience himself as a center and subject of his own action. (Fromm 2010, 78)

2 The Philosophy of Laughing at Oneself

How does humor fit in life, generally speaking? Many philosophers throughout the millennia seem to have been quite skeptical and even bitter about humor and laughter. Thinkers from Plato (for example, in *Republic* (2003, 388e) and *Laws* (2013,732c)) to Arthur Schopenhauer (1887, 281) have stressed how dark and unworthy our laughter is. Typically, according to Superiority Theory, we laugh when we see others as inferior to ourselves, and enjoy this feeling of superiority. In terms of Incongruity Theory, there is typically some kind of flaw present when we consider things to be funny.³

To overcome this morally problematic set up of highlighting others' flaws by laughter, some thinkers have emphasized the ability to laugh at oneself. At least, we cannot feel ourselves to be superior to anyone if we laugh at ourselves at the same time. The ability to laugh at oneself seems intuitively to be of high moral value. If I am laughing at myself, then, I cannot feel superior to others, as the Superiority Theory claims. Basically, I am not above my laughter and do not take myself too seriously. Self-ridiculing, in a way, clears the table from all separations.

The phenomenon of laughing at oneself has fascinated philosophers for centuries. Thomas Hobbes states that '*laughter is nothing else but a sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmities of others,*' which commits him to the Superiority Theory. But he also noticed that people have a habit of laughing at themselves upon certain occasions. For Hobbes, however, the object of this kind of laughter is not the present self. We might be able to laugh at some funny occasions that happened in the past – but if there is even a slight risk that we might make fools of ourselves by revealing something embarrassing via laughter, we cannot laugh (Hobbes 1640, ch. 9, par 13).

Quentin Skinner, who has studied the traditional theory of humor and laughter, points out that Hobbes writes about self-ridiculing in his earlier books like *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic*. But in *Leviathan* there is no room for this kind of laughter. Skinner ponders whether Hobbes considers the former self to be just like any other self (i.e. like the selves of others); then there is no need to distinguish these two. On the other hand, it is possible that Hobbes noticed that perhaps people really do not laugh at themselves as much as he had thought (Skinner 2004, 156–157).

Then again, for Sigmund Freud, it is quite obvious that the Superiority Theory will not stand because of the possibility of self-mockery. We can act as if we were crippled or stupid. When pretending, we might seem to be ludicrous, but our audience does not despise us and they do not condemn us as ridiculous. They do not feel superior to us because they know that we are just pretending (Freud 1916, 321).

Now, I have already mentioned two slightly different ways to laugh at oneself. According to Freud, we can play and present ourselves as a funny figure – and the audience laughs, even if not necessarily at our person. Instead, they might laugh with us. Hobbes, on the other hand, claims that we can laugh at ourselves when, for example, looking back and recalling something silly we did as a child. Still, there is a strong condition for this: we have to be sure that other people will not notice anything objectionable or anything else we should be ashamed of.

In addition, Charles Baudelaire notices that the sense of humor is in him who laughs and not in the object of laughter. However, there is an exception which flatters philosophers:

It is not the victim of a fall who laughs at his own misfortune, unless, that is, he happens to be a philosopher, in other words a being who, as the result of long habit, has acquired the power rapidly to become two persons at one and the same time, and can bring to bear on what happens to himself the disinterested curiosity of a spectator. But that is a rare gift. (Baudelaire 1956, 118)

There is a clear distinction between Baudelaire and Hobbes. Hobbes might place our former selves on the same level with others, but according to Baudelaire we are actually able to see ourselves in two different ways. There are at least a small number of people - philosophers - who are able to view their own fooleries from different points of view. Unfortunately, he does not further discuss this division of the self in more depth.

In any case, it seems that both Hobbes and Baudelaire see self-

ridiculing as an exceptional ability. Even Freud writes that having a humorous attitude (more about this later on) towards oneself is a rare and precious gift (Freud 1928). However, for these thinkers, it appears that not every one of us is capable of laughing at ourselves.

In reality, nowadays many of us – and the comedians in the front row – are perfectly fine with self-mockery. Once a rare feature, this is a common ability nowadays. Christie Davies points out that the world has changed since Hobbes' days and the fear of being laughed at is not as central as it used to be. He writes: '*An ironic self-deprecating humor has become fashionable even on formal occasions in part because direct displays of pride are seen as not in keeping with the spirit of the age*' (Davies 2009, 57). Other philosophers of humor, such as John Morreall (2010) and André Comte-Sponville (2001), claim that the ability to laugh at oneself is even virtuous.

The presupposed change of attitudes to self-ridiculing can be understood in the light of Fromm's social character. As social demands have altered through decades and centuries, so has the stand on humor and laughter. The current social character demands a new kind of flexibility or even fluidity, so we are more easily prone to ridicule ourselves now than we were in, perhaps, the 17th century. Still the question remains: What actually happens, in a philosophical sense, when an individual laughs at herself?

Recall that according to the Incongruity Theory, nothing is funny in itself but instead, something is funny only when observed in comparison with something else. So, when I am laughing at myself, do I compare myself with me and reckon myself as ridiculous? This hardly appears as a plausible claim; moreover it is a silly statement.

Therefore, we have to see ourselves as ridiculous in comparison to something other than us. One option is to examine ourselves in relation to cultural categorizations, social values, common opinions, or such. In relation to this social level, we are able to see ourselves as ridiculous. But then again, are we actually laughing at ourselves? If, say, I joke about my homosexuality, my obesity or me being an overweight gay, I recognize that there might be something different about me than the general public. Now, as I understand the difference between me and the everyday Joe, I might be able to laugh at myself in this relation. But this does not guarantee that I actually laugh at myself.

3 The Social Level in Self-Ridiculing

Sigmund Freud and Simon Critchley have, in spite of all, made an attempt to clarify this social level within an individual in relation to self-ridiculing. In his journal article called *Humour*, Freud handles his topic as a special

attitude and separates it from the comic and wit, which were his main targets in his studies considering jokes.⁴ Freud clarifies this with a distinction: in jokes we typically laugh at others, but in some cases we can have this humorous attitude also towards ourselves. Freud gives us an example about a criminal, who is going to be executed on Monday morning. As he walks to the gallows to be hanged, he looks up and says: *'Well, the week is beginning nicely'* (Freud 1928, 1).

In this occasion the one who tells the joke raises his own humor. For Freud, the phenomenon is quite vague but valuable: *'Like jokes and the comic, humor has something liberating about it; but it also has something of grandeur and elevation, which is lacking in the other two ways'* (Freud 1928, 2).

The grandeur element, for Freud, is about ego overcoming the real world – the ego denying that anything can wound it. Instead, it gains pleasure from external traumas offered by the world. For Freud, humor is a rebellious attitude (Freud 1928, 2). For the prisoner to be hanged, the aforementioned crack perhaps gives some kind of consolation. The inevitable is coming, and at least he cannot make the situation any worse by joking.

In the Freudian interpretation, when people laugh at themselves, we have to examine the relationship between ego and super-ego. If a person examines his own personality with a humorous attitude, he treats himself in a way as a child and at the same moment he relates to this child as an adult. In these occasions, amusement in itself is not that important; instead the purpose of the amusement is the essential thing. Via humor we can yell that even if the world appears to be dangerous and repressing, we can always joke about it (Freud 1928, 3).

For the sake of brevity we cannot go through Freud's psychoanalytical theories in more depth at this point. The central notion is, in any case, that with a humorous attitude and by laughing at ourselves we relate to ourselves like an adult relates to a child.

This 'child relation' is important for Freud also in his book about jokes (1916), but there is one obvious difference. By joking, we relate ourselves to the object of laughter as an adult relates to a child. For a child, her sources of suffering and points of interest are no doubt great and important, but the joker sees a child's grievances and delights in them as relatively small and unimportant when he compares them to an adult's worldly concerns. It is all about perspective. So, when we are able to laugh at ourselves, we see our own sorrows as quite insignificant. As such, we gain a new standpoint with regard to ourselves and perhaps even to the whole world. For Freud this wider perspective, the humorous attitude, is more distinguished than plain mocking of others. The dignity is perhaps obscure but there is something sublime about humor.

Freud's interpretation of humor has inspired Simon Critchley who bases his vision of humane humor on it. For Critchley, the pattern is clear: because in jokes we laugh at others, and therefore see ourselves superior when compared with the objects of the joke, humor (as Freud uses the concept) is a morally superior option: *'laughter at oneself is better than laughter at others'* (Critchley 2004, 96, 108).

For Critchley, humor reminds us about our own humbleness and limitations that are built-in in human life. But at the same time humor also functions as an anti-depressant. Critchley emphasizes that even though the super-ego is usually a hard master, in humor the case is altered. In humor the super-ego gives consolation to the ego and it does not punish the silly lad: *'This is a positive super-ego that liberates and elevates by allowing the ego to find itself ridiculous'* (Critchley 2004, 101–103).

Roughly stated, the super-ego can be seen as identification with parental agency. It punishes misbehavior with feelings of guilt, and because of it, the individual strives to act in a socially appropriate manner. But in Critchley's interpretation the super-ego loosens its control. If we learn to laugh, especially at ourselves, then we may be able to understand ourselves and the world around us in a deeper way.

Critchley admires Samuel Beckett in the field of humor. Beckett has an exceptional capability to raise laughter that forces us to think. *'This is the highest laugh, the mirthless laugh, the laugh laughing at the laugh'* (Critchley 2004, 49). This kind of laughter opens our eyes and causes us to drop our defenses, at least momentarily. And at this precise moment Beckett's ingenuity becomes clear: *'We realize in an instant that the object of laughter is the subject who laughs'* (Critchley 2004, 49–50). This moment can even be frightening, and for Critchley, laughter is not always about pleasure. Instead, this feeling of pleasure might be mixed with the notion of uncanniness, and it is possible to be quite troubled by what we laugh at (Critchley 2004, 56–57).

All in all, we are melancholic animals, says Critchley, but also the most cheerful: *'We smile and find ourselves ridiculous. Our wretchedness is our greatness'* (Critchley 2004, 111). He stresses that, nevertheless, we should not laugh at anything at any price. Critchley praises this humane humor that does not bring unhappiness but rather elevation and which is emancipating and comforting (Critchley 2004, 111). For him: *'True humour consists in laughing at oneself'* (Critchley 2009, 230).

4 Philosophical Problems of Self-Ridiculing

So who has the last laugh? In Critchley's characterization there is something poetically comforting in laughing at oneself. For him and Freud, the

relationship between the subject and object of laughter can be found in the light of internalized social demands, that is, in the relationship between super-ego and ego. Nonetheless, it is not too clear what the object of laughter actually is: if I laugh at myself, what do I consider funny?

In the English language there is a difference between laughing *at* someone and laughing *with* someone. This distinction is quite clear. Also, we may admit that in our everyday language it is not too strange to state: I can laugh at myself. But it is quite obscure if someone claims that she laughs *with* herself. This raises the questions: what is this 'I' who laughs and what is the target, i.e. 'myself', who is laughed at? Philosophers of humor have not fully explicated this. But with Freudian interpretation and Critchley's thoughts, we can formulate that we are able to evaluate ourselves in relation to social estimations. As our super-ego (internalized social demands) sees the ego as a child, we observe ourselves in the light of cultural values and the like.

It can be interpreted that laughing at oneself also signals that I do not identify myself with, for instance, my poor eyesight and glasses, my inability to pronounce the alveolar trill or other features of mine. They are all my features, but they do not define me. In this way, I am able to detach myself from, for example, my limping left leg. This means that I do have a limping leg but I am not the limping leg. These are all my features but they do not actually define me.

This kind of viewpoint has not, presumably, been present throughout times and my assumption is that there are some cultural and historical differences at play. For example, in previous centuries people were more strictly determined by their social and economic class than they are today. In a sense, modern days are freer than earlier times, and the appearance of self-ridiculing can be interpreted as a sign of this freedom. But is there a cost for this freedom? If we do not identify ourselves with our professions, hobbies, bodies, thoughts, what is left? This can be interpreted to be a modern kind of alienation from oneself. Is there some kind of Cartesian soul lurking at the end of this line of thinking? My claim is that we are, after all, built on our thoughts, feelings, hopes, and so on. We cannot get rid of them.

If one thinks that she is thoroughly ridiculous wherever she is and whatever she does, she cannot take herself seriously any more. If one sees her own hopes and plans just as jokes, how can one act in the world any longer? It is as if this individual is in some way incongruous with herself, and does not have any self-respect. As such, the fun has probably already vanished and tragedy has taken over. And still, we have a cultural demand for self-ridiculing. We must be able to laugh at ourselves everywhere and at every moment. In the age of irony, the message is that nothing can be too

serious for us – not even ourselves.

So, if the contemporary social character demands that we laugh at ourselves in this previous sense, it is problematic. It goes in line with what Michael Maccoby writes about the negative sides of the interactive social character. The interactives lack personality, integration and loyalty, and so: *'[T]hey are connected to many and related to few if any. They are so used to adapting to different situations, of wearing different masks, that they are in danger of losing their center, the person behind the mask'* (Maccoby 2014, 13).

Unlike what this trait demands, to live a full, rich human life, we need some kind of serious backbone, that is, a frame of reference and a baseline. This is the basis of Fromm's social philosophy. We have to have some values which are serious to us, and only after we find those values might we be able to compare some of our current opinions or ways of behavior, and see something funny about them (cf. Fromm 2010, 75–82). After that, hopefully, we can update our behavior and see the world slightly differently. A continually joking stance towards life, apprehending everything with humor and laughter, is practically impossible - especially if we are observing ourselves. We should not always try to find our own ridiculousness. This is exactly what Erich Fromm means when he writes about our capability to say 'I' - and about the fact that the lack of this ability means insanity.

There are at least two problematic possibilities when we consider what may happen to the person behind the mask when we laugh at ourselves: 1) The person, 'I', is destroyed, or 2) the 'I' disappears from the sight of others, and possibly even from the joker herself.

Detachment from bodily features, thoughts and emotional expressions goes against what Fromm considers to be the basic needs pertaining to the human condition. This detachment presents dangers: our social relations may become hollow, we may no longer confront others in a sincere manner, and we might even become alienated from ourselves. This can be considered to be a personal and a social pathology. It has consequences even for reciprocal recognition: our interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships could become distorted. How can we face others and ourselves if we have no 'I'?

5 Conclusion

When someone implies that laughing at oneself is a good thing, no questions asked, we should be alarmed. It is an ideological statement, and in many cases false. So, if we convince ourselves that any kind of laughing at ourselves is the key to humane humor, the concept becomes ideological. My claim is that laughing at oneself does not justify anything by itself. Instead,

we have to consider how this laughter relates to our attitudes and emotions, to our character and to others. In some sense, Simon Critchley appears to consider this laughing at oneself as the goal, the end, of humor. But in a Frommian sense, it should be seen as a starting point towards humane humor and recognizing oneself and others. In a certain respect, the most private side of humor – laughing at oneself – is actually strongly based on social estimations.

Critchley has it partially correct when he stresses that laughing at oneself is a better option than laughing at others. This, however, cannot be taken as a secure principle. This supposedly morally highest form of humor and laughter – self-ridiculing, belittling oneself, laughing at oneself – is not a foolproof way to save ourselves and others from all the possible miseries that can be related to fun and amusement. Let us consider Pagliacci, the poor clown in the opening joke of the article. Freud's and Critchley's position would not give him much consolation. Even though Pagliacci is extremely funny, and he probably knows that himself, he is deeply depressed. He needs to have some other reference point than just a notion about our two-fold nature being melancholic and cheerful. The clown in the story is an outsider, beyond any traditional help. He does not belong anywhere and he is all alone in the universe. Laughter does not cure anything for him. I interpret this to mean that in a Frommian sense, he needs relatedness.

To understand the value of laughing at oneself and humor in general, we always need to consider also our social roles, cultural values, and positions in a society. Laughter does not resound in a vacuum; humor appears only in relationships, be they about conceptual categorizations, feelings of superiority, or something else. Nothing is funny in itself, but only when compared with something else.

The crucial problem is that we intuitively see laughing at oneself as the ultimate goal – that laughter is the end of this so-called humane development. But Frommian criticism demands that we cannot settle for this kind of laughter. Laughing at oneself does not actually state or guarantee anything. Laughter and joy are positive phenomena in general, but they can be used as a means to some problematic end – they might be, for example, a form of social dominance. A Frommian consideration might state that the contemporary laughing at oneself is actually just a mechanism of escape via which we might run away from boredom or ourselves. But this is not, in a humanistic sense, elevating. It is just a temporary cure for the symptoms, not for the disease itself.

I do not claim that laughing at oneself is always pathological. There is also a humane possibility in humor and in self-ridiculing. Examining this in a more profound manner is a job for another article but we can formulate

some guidelines: by ridiculing ourselves, we might find our current situation to be ridiculous. Genuine laughter rejoices in the absurdity of the world and the limitedness of our concepts and categorizations. Still, this limitedness need not be daunting but can stimulate us to search for new ways to grow as human beings. All this, to be truly humanistic, is done in relation to ideals, which Fromm emphasizes. Laughter, in its highest form, can be a starting point for a joyful realization of the nature of things. In this way, humor can be radical. To be radical, we need to transcend the everyday level of thinking and language. That is, we need to challenge our current way of living. As such, humanistic humor is not restricted just to laughing at oneself. While we laugh at ourselves, we must be able to rejoice at the absurdity of the whole world. Fromm claims:

When I experience myself fully, then I recognize that I am the same as any other human being, that I am the child, the sinner, the saint, the one who hopes and the one who despairs, the one who can feel joy and the one who can feel sadness. I discover that only the thought concepts, the customs, the surface are different, and that the human substance is the same. I discover that I am everybody, and that I discover myself in discovering my fellow man, and vice versa. (Fromm 2006, 131)

This holds also for humor and laughter. According to Maccoby, who was a friend of Fromm, Fromm considered the sense of humor to be '*the emotional equivalent of a cognitive sense of reality*' (2009, 143). So, given the absurd nature of the world and our limited categorizations in relation to it (cf. Fromm 1990, 77), we may well find ourselves as ridiculous. But this is just a starting point – not the end of humorous experience. Humor has the potential to reach beyond our everyday illusions. And yet, we should not claim this to be the purpose of humor. Humor has no purpose, even though it is easy to think that humor releases pressure, laughter prolongs life, joking keeps our minds lively, and so forth. But in a Frommian spirit, I claim that humor should not have any goals. If we use humor to achieve some extraneous purpose, it obscures the meaning of humor itself. In this sense, humor is not something to be consumed; it is an expression of the human condition in the world.

Jarno Hietalahti (jarno.hietalahti@jyu.fi) is a PhD student at the University of Jyväskylä, and he is currently finishing his doctoral dissertation in the Erich Fromm Institute Tübingen. His research focuses on Erich Fromm and the social philosophy of humor.

Bibliography

- Attardo, S. (2008) 'A Primer for the Linguistics of Humor' in V. Raskin (ed.) *The Primer of Humor Research* Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter
- Baudelaire, C. (1956) 'The Essence of Laughter' (trans. G. Hopkins) in *The Essence of Laughter and Other Essays, Journals and Letters* New York: Meridan Books
- Comte-Sponville, A. (2001) *A Small Treatise on the Great Virtues: The Uses of Philosophy in Everyday Life* (trans. C. Temerson) New York: Metropolitan Books. Henry Holt and Company
- Critchley, S. (2009) *The Book of Dead Philosophers* London: Granta Books
- Critchley, S. (2004) *On Humour* London/New York: Routledge
- Davies, C. (2009) 'Humor theory and the fear of being laughed at' in *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 22, Issue 1-2, 49–62
- Freud, S. (1928) 'Humour' (trans. J. Riviere) in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* vol. 9, 1–6
- Freud, S. (1916) *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious* (trans. A. A. Brill) New York: Moffat, Yard and Company
- Fromm, E. (2010) 'Psychic Needs and Society' in E. Fromm *Beyond Freud. From Individual to Social Psychoanalysis* New York: AMFH, 75–82
- Fromm, E. (2008) *To Have or To Be?* London/New York: Continuum
- Fromm, E. (2006) *Beyond the Chains of Illusion: My Encounter with Marx and Freud* New York: Continuum
- Fromm, E. (2003) *Man for Himself. An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics* London/New York: Routledge
- Fromm, E. (2000) 'Human Nature and Social Theory' in *Fromm Forum* 4/2000 Tübingen: International Erich Fromm Society
- Fromm, E. (1994) *Escape From Freedom* New York: Henry Holt and Company

Fromm, E. (1990) *The Revision of Psychoanalysis* Boulder/San Francisco/Oxford: Westview Press

Funk, R. (2014) 'Foreword: Erich Fromm's Social psychological approach and its Relevance for Today' in S. J. Miri, R. Lake & T. M. Kress (eds.) *Reclaiming the Sane Society* Rotterdam/Boston/Taipei: Sense Publishers, xi–xxiv

Hobbes, T. (1640) *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic* [online] Constitution Society, Accessed 14.10.2014, <http://www.constitution.org/th/elements.htm>

Hurley, M. M., Dennett, D. C. & Adams, R. B., Jr. (2011) *Inside Jokes. Using Humor to Reverse-Engineer the Mind* Cambridge, Massachusetts/London, England: The MIT Press

Knapp, G. P. (1989) *The Art of Living. Erich Fromm's Life and Works* New York/Bern/Frankfurt am Main/Paris: Peter Lang

Maccoby, M. (2014) 'Building on Erich Fromm's Scientific Contributions' in *Fromm Forum 18/2014* Tübingen: International Erich Fromm Society

Maccoby, M. (2009) 'Fromm Didn't Want to Be a Frommian' in R. Funk (ed.) *The Clinical Erich Fromm. Personal Accounts and Papers on Therapeutic Technique* Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, pp.141–143

Morreall, J. (2010) 'Comic Vices and Comic Virtues' in *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 23, 1–26

Plato (2013) *Laws* [Online] (trans. B. Jowett) The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, Accessed 14.10.2014, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1750/1750-h/1750-h.htm>

Plato (2003) *The Republic* (trans. T. Griffith) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Schopenhauer, A. (1887) *The World as Will and Idea. Volume II* [Online] (trans. R. B. Haldane & J. Kemp) Boston, Accessed 14.10.2014, <https://archive.org/details/theworldaswill02schouoft>

Skinner, Q. (2004) 'Hobbes and the Classical Theory of Laughter' in T. Sorell & L. Foisneau (ed.) *Leviathan after 350 Years* Oxford: Clarendon Press

Watchmen (2009) Dir. Zack Snyder, Paramount Pictures. Film.

Endnotes

¹ In different versions of the joke, the clown is called, among other, Carlin and Terrifini. This version of the joke is from the movie *Watchmen* (2009).

² Fromm defines productivity as such: “The ‘productive orientation’ of personality refers to a fundamental attitude, a mode of relatedness in all realms of human experience. (...) Productiveness is man’s ability to use his powers and realize the potentialities inherent in him.” (Fromm 2003, 61)

³ These two theories of humor and laughter are congruent with each other. We need to have some kind of general conceptualization which says how the world runs and what the so-called normal circumstances are. Then, when things surprise us and something odd happens, humor strikes in and we laugh. This is, of course, not the whole case: sometimes odd occasions might, for example, scare us or make us sad. But, as this is not a strictly analytical article about humor and laughter, I keep things simple and use these as a general framework for my analysis.

⁴ Freud uses the concept of humor slightly differently than I do elsewhere in this article.

III

HUUMORIN KAHLITTU VAPAUS

by

Hietalahti, J.

Teoksessa S. Knuuttila, P. Hakamies ja E. Lampela (toim.) Kalevalaseuran 94. vuosikirja: Huumorin skaalat. Esitys, tyyli ja tarkoitus. SKS. 2015, 19-35.

Julkaistu SKS:n luvalla / Reproduced with permission by the publisher

Jarno Hietalahti

HUUMORIN KAHLITTU VAPAUS

Tarkastelen tässä artikkelissa huumoria ja naurua kulttuurisina ilmiöinä sekä niiden suhdetta vapauteen. Yhteiskuntafilosofinen näkökulmani huvituksiin ja vapauteen paikantuu humanistifilosofi Erich Frommin (1900–1980) sosiaalipsykoanalyttiseen katsantoon.

Teksti kunnioittaa niin sanotun Frankfurtin koulukunnan filosofista ihanetta, jossa maailmassa vallitsevaa ilmiötä tarkastellaan kriittisesti filosofisten käsitteiden avulla. Keskeinen väitteeni on, että huumori ei ole vapauden hui pentuma. Esimerkiksi arkipuheessa toistuvasti pyritään vapautumaan vastuusta omien sanomisten suhteen toteamalla, että kyse oli ainoastaan vitsailusta. Tällöin huumorin varjolla pyritään oikeuttamaan käytännössä mikä tahansa räävitön ilmaus eli humoristisuuteen vetoamalla yritetään häivyttää asian vakavuus. Esitän kuitenkin, että huumori yksinään ei oikeuta mitään. Artikkelini kommunikoi Michael Billigin kriittisiin analyyseihin, joissa kulttuurissa valitseva suhtautumistapa huumoriin, ”ideologinen positivismi” (Billigin käsitepari) kyseenalaistetaan (esim. Billig 2005a, 2005b).¹

Tekstissä nauru koskee huumorin nostattamaa naurua eikä esimerkiksi hermostuneisuudesta aiheutuvaa hekottelua tai vauvojen jokeltelun sävyttämää kujertelua. Huumori puolestaan on yläkäsite, jonka alle erilaiset hauskuuden genret voidaan sijoittaa. Tämä sateenvarjokäsite kattaa niin farssin, ironian, satiirin kuin parodianakin. Huumorin eri tyylilajien välillä on eroja, mutta niiden eksplikointi on toisten tutkimusten tehtävä. Tekstissä huumorin tyyppiesimerkkinä toimii vitsi. Vitsailu ei kata kaikkea huumoria, mutta lyhyessä artikkelissa vitsit ovat erinomaisia esimerkkejä huumorin luonteesta.

Artikkelin alussa käsittelen vapauden suhdetta huumoriin kolmesta näkökulmasta: 1) Vapaus huumorin sisällä. Tämä viittaa esimerkiksi heikentyneisiin logiikan vaatimuksiin, kun huumori tyypillisesti pohjautuu ristiriitoihin. 2) Huumorin suoma vapautus. Tässä näkökulmassa vapaus linkittyy Sigmund Freudin näkemyksiin siitä, kuinka vitsailun varjolla voidaan kiertää niin sisäisiä kuin ulkoisiakin esteitä. 3) Huumorin ja sananvapauden suhde. Sananvapauden vetoamalla toistuvasti esitetään, että kaikesta on voitava vitsailla.

Vaikka edelliset näkökulmat ovat merkittäviä huumori-ilmiön kannalta, esittelen niiden jälkeen kattavamman vapauskäsitteksen Erich Frommin ajattelun pohjalta. Huumoria ei tule käsittää muusta elämästä irrallisena alueena, vaan hupiin ja hauskuuteen liittyy aina vakavuus. Samoin Frommin käsitys vapaudesta lomittuu laajemmin ihmisenä olemisen ehtoihin ja päämääriin. Näin ollen huumorikin on kytköksissä humanistisiin ideaaleihin.

Koska huumori ja nauru kaikesta huolimatta kuuluvat olennaisella tavalla ihmiselämään, ei yksittäisten vitsiaiheiden kieltäminen tai kriminalisointi ole toimiva ratkaisu. Frommilaisittain ajateltuna yksittäisten huvitusten aihetason erittely ei lopulta olekaan ratkaisevaa, vaan näkökulmaa on laajennettava. Keskeistä on tarkastella, miten huumori suhtautuu laajempaan inhimilliseen kas-

vuun ja vapauteen. Tällöin olennaista ei varsinaisesti ole mitä huumorissa käsitellään, vaan miten aihetta käsitellään (vrt. Lockyer 2005 & Pickering, 4–5).

Tekstin lopussa esitän Erich Frommin ajatuksiin nojautuen, että äärimmilleen venytetty vaatimus huumorin vapaudesta on sosiaalinen kahle. Humanistisessa mielessä vapautta on sen sijaan nähdä niin sanotusti naurun taakse ja mahdollisuus pohtia huumoriamme.

Huumorin vapaudet

Länsimaisessa kulttuurissa huumori ja vapaus linkittyvät yhteen. Martin Grotjahn esittää iskulauseen omaisesti: ”Nauru antaa vapauden ja vapaus antaa naurun” (Grotjahn 1957, ix). Niin suomalaiset kuin ulkomaalaisetkin koomikot ja humoristit esittävät, että meillä täytyy olla vapaus vitsailla kaikesta. Tällainen vapauskäsitelmä limittyy ensisijaisesti rajoitusten puuttumiseen. Tausta-ajatuksena on, että huumoria ei saa kahlita esimerkiksi laeilla. Tähän liittyen Mr. Beanina tunnetuksi tullut Rowan Atkinson on julkisesti vedonnut, että oikeus loukata on paljon tärkeämpi kuin mikään oikeus olla tulematta loukatuksi (The Guardian, 2004). Tarkastelen seuraavaksi kolmea erilaista huumoriin liittyvää vapauden muotoa (lista ei välttämättä ole täydellisen kattava).

Ensinnäkin huumorin maailma on sisäisesti vapaampi kuin niin sanottu tosimaailma. Huumorissa on vähemmän rajoituksia kuin arkisessa fysiikan lakien ja aristoteelisen logiikan määrittelemässä maailmassa. Huumorin puitteissa voi luontevasti puhua vaikkapa miehistä, jotka kävelevät katossa tai kalojen kanssa lisääntyvistä norsuista sekä muista lukemattomista ihmeellisyyksistä. Esimerkiksi Michael Mulkay (1988, 20) korostaa, että kun siirrytään niin sanotusta vakavasta puhetavasta humoristiseen, vitsailijalle avautuu suurempi vapaus asioiden ilmaisemiseen. Täsmennetään tätä lapsuuden riemuista ammentavalla vitsillä: ”Mitä karpänen sanoi lennettyään hevosen suuhun? – Nyt olen turvassa.”

Tässä kohden ei ole olennaista, pitääkö lukija vitsiä hauskana vai ei. Joka tapauksessa juttu ilmentää muutamia huumorille suotuja erityisvapauksia. Vitsin lukija tuskin alkaa tivata, että eivät karpäset oikeasti osaa puhua. Hän tunnistaa, kuten Mulkay ehdottaa (1988, 20), että kyse ei ole biologisen teorian esittämisestä vaan vitsistä. Meille on intuitiivisesti selvää, että vitseillä on erityinen asema kulttuurissamme (ks. Kuipers 2006). Arkisessa ajattelussamme saamme olla suhteellisen varmoja, että karpäset eivät kauhean paljon jutustele eivätkä ainakaan käytä letkautuksissa hyväkseen suomalaisten käsitteiden monia merkityksiä. Useimmat kulttuurissa kasvaneet ihmiset tunnistavat välittömästi, että kyse on huumorista tai vitsailusta.

Usein huumorissa logiikan kahleet murtuvat ja fysiikan lait kumoutuvat. Aristoteelisessa logiikassa esimerkiksi ristiriita on suurin mahdollinen virhe. Ristiriidan lain mukaan P ja ei-P eivät voi vallita yhtä aikaa maailmassa. Jos P ja ei-P olisivat valloillaan samanaikaisesti, voitaisiin yhtälöstä päätellä mitä tahansa eikä minkäänlaisia rajoituksia enää olisi. Kuvattu tila on normaalille järjenkäytölle mahdoton.

Huumorin maailmassa sen sijaan ristiriidat ja totutusta poikkeavat ilmiöt ovat alati läsnä. Esimerkiksi filosofi Søren Kierkegaard on tiivistänyt inkongruenssi- eli yhteensopimattomuusteorian ydinajatuksen toteamalla, että ”missä on ristiriitaa, siellä on koomisuus läsnä” (Kierkegaard 1993, 519). Niinpä vitseissä, sketseissä ja sarjakuvissa voi sattua periaatteessa mitä tahansa. Fysiikan perinteiset vaatimukset kiistetään, kun yhtenä hetkenä piirroselokuvissa hahmo saattaa tallustella ilmassa, mutta oivallettuaan tilanteensa painovoima alkaakin yhtäkkiä vaikuttaa ja repii hänet maan kamaralle.

Siinä missä huumorin maailman sisällä vallitsee vapaus esimerkiksi logiikan vaatimuksista, vitsailun varjolla voidaan myös vapaammin esittää näkemysnormaalista maailmasta. Tämän oivalsi jo Sigmund Freud. Freudin katsannon mukaan ihmisillä on moninaisia toiveita ja haluja, jotka eivät aina solju yhteen moraalisiin tai yhteiskunnan vaatimusten kanssa. Monesti nämä halut joudutaan tukahduttamaan, koska ihmiset eivät yleisesti ottaen halua rikkoa vallitsevia moraalikoodeja vastaan. Vitsailun myötä ihmiselle kuitenkin avautuu väylä ilmaista salaisia halujaan. Kun mielipide verhotetaan vitsikaapuun, ihminen ei ainakaan pintapuolisesti riko niin voimakkaasti yhteiskunnan odotuksia vastaan. Koska vitsissä vapautemme on suurempi, sen avulla voimme kiertää sekä ulkoisia että sisäisiä esteitä. Tällöin meidän ei tarvitse kuluttaa energiaamme tukahduttamiseen, kun salatut himot voidaan lävyyttää muiden eteen verhotussa muodossa. Olennaista Freudin teoriassa onkin, että vitsin taakse kätkeytyy toistuvasti erittäin merkityksellisiä asioita ja saatamme ilmaista varsin painavia näkökantoja. Jos kulttuuri on rajoittunut vaikkapa seksuaalisten suuntautumisten suhteen, yhteiskunnallisia rajoituksia voidaan kiertää vitsaillemalla seksuaalisuudesta. Parhaimmillaan huumori voi poistaa sisäisiä patoutumia, kun omat henkiset esteet onnistutaan kiertämään. Tällöin vitsailu voi olla psykologisesti hyvin vapauttavaa ja oivaltavaa. (Freud 1983.)

Filosofien lisäksi myös huumorin ammattilaiset ovat oivaltaneet vapauden tärkeyden huumorissa. Tämä välittyi esimerkiksi 1960- ja 1970-luvun taitteessa riemastuttaneen koomikkoryhmä Monty Pythonin tekemisessä. Yleisellä tasolla Monty Python tuuletti konservatiivisen brittiläisen luokkayhteiskunnan ummehtunutta sisäilmaa. Ryhmä ei tyytynyt repimään riemuaan kuitenkaan mistään yksittäisestä luokkataistelusta vaan pyrki nauramaan käytännössä kaikelle mahdolliselle. Yhden jakson sisällä komedia saattoi ensin olla hyväntuulisen hellyttävää ja muuttua hetkessä todella oudoksi. Hurmaavuuden ja raa’an väkivallan välille ei pystytetty liian tiukkaa rajaa. Pythonissa vaikuttanut Michael Palin on myöhemmin painottanut, että ohjelman *vapauttavaa merkitystä* ei pidä väheksyä. Hänelle Monty Python oli kuuden humoristin yhteenliittymä, jonka tärkein yhteinen nimittäjä oli vapaus. (Chapman & al 2008, 471.)

Sananvapaus on keskeinen periaate ihmisoikeuksien yleismaailmallisessa julistuksessa, kuten Paul Sturges huomauttaa. Hänen mukaansa niin koomikot kuin informaatiotieteiden ammattilaisetkin puolustavat tekemisillään tätä vapautta. (Sturges 2010.) Sananvapauten vedoten linjauksena on, että kaikesta on voitava vitsailla eikä huumoria pidä kahlita. Moderneissa länsimaissa on vapaus ilmaista ja pitää mielipiteitä ilman pelkoa siitä, että viranomaiset puuttuvat

asiaan. Suomi on tässä suhteessa olennaisesti vapaampi maa kuin vaikkapa Neuvostoliitto, jossa Stalinin aikana vankiloissa istui tietävästi enimmillään jopa 200 000 ihmistä poliittisten vitsein vääntämisestä (Puukko & Susiluoto 2009, 12).

Tähän huumorin vapauden muotoon kuuluu ennakkosensuurin puuttuminen. Antiikin Kreikassa esimerkiksi Platonilla oli haaveena, että ihannevaltiossa tulisi lakiteitse määrätä, kenellä on oikeus pilkanteeseen mistäkin aiheesta (Platon 1986, 343). Historia on kuitenkin osoittanut, että tällainen asioiden ennakolta kieltäminen ei toimi huumorin suhteen ja tyypillisesti tiukat rajat vain yllyttävät koomikkoja vitsailemaan kielletyistä aiheista (Nevanlinna 1988). Modernilla riemun aikakaudella rajoitusten puuttumisen ja sananvapauden nimissä vaatimuksena onkin, että mistä tahansa on voitava tehdä pilkkaa. Mikäli virallinen taho määrää, että emme voi vitsailla jostain tietystä aiheesta, on yhteiskuntamme liian tukahduttava.

Sananvapaus on korkea ihanne, mutta sen puoleen vetoavat eivät aina muista, että tähän vapauteen linkittyy vastuu. Lakiteknisesti sananvapaudelle on tiettyjä rajoituksia niissä tapauksissa, joissa kielenkäytöllä pyritään loukkaamaan jotain toista oikeutta. Syytenimikkeitä voivat olla esimerkiksi kunnianloukkaus tai uskonrauhan rikkominen. Huumorin äärellä räikein viimeaikainen esimerkki sananvapauden ja muiden oikeuksien törmäämisestä koettiin niin sanottujen Muhammad-pilapiirrosten yhteydessä.² Vuonna 2005 tanskalainen *Jyllands-Posten* julkaisi 12 profeetta Muhammadia käsittelevää pilapiirrosta. Tapauksesta kehkeytyi kansainvälinen selkkaus, jonka myötä järjestettiin ostoboikotteja ja mielenosoituksia, esitettiin tappo- ja pommiuhkauksia sekä poltettiin lähetystöjä (tapauksesta tarkemmin esim. Lockyer & Pickering 2008). Monet muslimit tuomitsivat pilapiirotukset loukkaavina, kun taas länsimaissa vedottiin sananvapauteen ja kuvia julkaistiin uudestaan samoin kuin laadittiin uusia pilapiirotuksia profeetasta.

Edellä esitetystä käy ilmi, että huumori on yhteydessä poliittiseen vapauteen. Tätä huumorin vapauden puolta on korostanut John Morreall, jonka mukaan huumori muun muassa edesauttaa demokratian toteutumista taistelussa diktatuureja vastaan. Yleisesti ottaen Morreall näkee, että keskeistä huumorissa on ajattelun vapaus, jolloin se on vapauttava elementti myös sosiaalisten käytössääntöjen ja moraalin vaatimusten kannalta. (Morreall 1983, 101–103.) Tässä kohden voidaan kuitenkin huomauttaa, että kyse ei voi olla ainoastaan totaalisesta rajojen puuttumisesta tai absoluuttisesta oikeudesta tehdä mitä vain, koska vapaus linkittyy yhteen vastuun kanssa. Michael Pickering ja Sharon Lockyer aiheellisesti kysyvätkin, kuinka luovia sillä petollisella maaperällä, joka sijaitsee hauskuuden ja hyökkäävyyden, vapaan puheen ja kulttuurisen kunnioituksen välissä (Lockyer & Pickering 2006, 3). Lähtökohtana täytyy olla, että meillä on oikeuksia ja velvollisuuksia suhteessa muihin ihmisiin. Vaikka huumorin äärellä sananvapaus on keskeinen tekijä, meidän ei silti tarvitse niellä mitä tahansa pilkkaa.

Näkökulmaa voi edelleen kääntää kohti laajempaa yhteisöllistä elämää. Huumorin sosiaalisesta merkityksestä on tehty merkittäviä tutkimuksia (esim.

Kuipers 2006; Lockyer & Pickering 2005; Billig 2005a), joiden intellektuaalisena jatkumona tämä artikkeli voidaan nähdä. Aikaisempia täydentäen nojaan tässä artikkelissa Erich Frommin ajatteluun, minkä valossa välittyy, että kaikesta mahdollisesta pilkan väentäminen ei välttämättä olekaan suurin mahdollinen vapauden huipentuma. Selvitän tätä frommilaista näkökulmaa vapauteen ja huumoriin seuraavissa luvuissa.

Fromm ja humanistinen vapaus

Sananvapauden puolustaminen on erittäin tärkeää. Ei kuitenkaan riitä, että meillä on yksittäisiä räätälöityjä vapauden muotoja, joiden varassa sitten vaadimme muun muassa, että kaikesta on voitava vitsailla. Erich Frommin näemyksiin nojaten voidaan vapauden yksittäisiin momentteihin linkittyvää katsantoa kritisoida liian kapeaksi.

Sananvapaus on helppo käsittää vapauden huipentumana, mutta Frommin mukaan tämäkin vapaus pitää pystyä kontekstualisoimaan. Sananvapaus on merkittävä saavutus vanhojen rajoitusten puitteissa, mutta emme ole Frommin mielestä vielä *vapautuneet sisäisesti*. Hän katsookin, että me hyvin pitkälti ajattelemme ja sanomme tismalleen samoja asioita kuin muut emmekä ole nousseet oman alkuperäisen ajattelun tasolle. Silti vaadimme, että kukaan ei saa estää meitä ilmaisemasta meidän ajatuksiamme – vaikka usein ajatukset eivät edes ole omiamme. (Fromm 1976b, 96–97.)

Frommin kritiikin ydin osuu uskomukseen siitä, että muodolliset vapaudet tekisivät meistä myös inhimillisesti vapaita. Hänen mukaansa vapausvaatimuksissa onkin hairahdettu väärille urille. Poliittinen vapaus edistää inhimillistä vapautta ainoastaan siinä tapauksessa, että se edistää inhimillistä kehitystä. Mikäli tämä ehto ei täyty, ja yhteiskunta ennemminkin edistää epähumaneja taipumuksia, poliittinen vapaus muuntuu vapauden riistoksi. (Fromm 1969, 111–112.)

Yksipuolinen näkemys huumorin vapaudesta rajoitusten puutteena tai kumoamisena ei ole lopulta erityisen hedelmällinen. Sen sijaan huumori ja vapaus on nähtävä osana laajempaa inhimillistä kokonaiskuvaa. Frommin mukaan vapaus ei esimerkiksi ole sama asia kuin mielivalta ja umpimähkäisyys, vaan meillä on ihmisyyteen kuuluvia mahdollisuuksia ja rajoituksia. Vapaus tarkoittaa olennaisesti vapautta kasvaa ihmisenä ihmisyyttä säätelevien sääntöjen mukaisesti. Näissä puitteissa meidän tulisi pyrkiä kohti suotuisinta mahdollista kehitystä. (Fromm 1977, 99.)

Kuten todettua, sananvapaus on kaikesta huolimatta yksi merkittävä saavutettu etu eikä siitä pitäisi luopua. Sananvapaudella on merkitystä muun muassa taistelussa tabuoitumista vastaan (Fromm 1976b, 206). Esimerkiksi vitsailun suhteen on turha kategorisesti kieltää joidenkin yksittäisten sanojen käyttö. Tämä ei kuitenkaan tarkoita, että kaikesta pitäisi vitsailla kaiken aikaa millä tavalla vain. Humanistisen huumorin ydin on jossain muualla kuin pelkissä aiheisällöissä – kyse on ennemminkin siitä, miten näitä aiheisältöjä käytetään ja millaista suhdetta tämä rakentaa muihin.

Yleisesti ottaen vapauden luonne on Frommille dialektinen. Samalla kun vanhat kahleet ovat murtuneet, ihmisestä on tullut riippumattomampi ja kriittisempi mutta myös eristäytyneempi, yksinäisempi ja pelokkaampi. (Fromm 1976b, 95–96.) Kun moderni vapaus tuo mukanaan uhkia, joihin vanhoista yhteiskuntasiteistä ei enää löydy turvaa, näkymä alkaa vaikuttaa ahdistavalta. Tämä yksinäisyys on kuitenkin mahdollista ylittää kehittämällä humaaneja voimia ja humanistisiin arvoihin perustuvalla yhteydellä muihin ihmisiin (Fromm 1969, 89). Esitän, että huumorin vapautta tulisikin tarkastella suhteessa näihin arvoihin.

Vapaus ulkoisista siteistä on historian saatossa edistynyt, mutta Frommia seuraten tulkitsen, että emme ole onnistuneet vapautumaan sisäisesti. Meillä on edelleen lukuisia sisäisiä esteitä ja pakotteita, jotka estävät meitä todella vapautumasta. Kun siis käymme vaatimaan, että kaikesta pitää saada vitsailla, emme oikeastaan ajattele vaatimuksemme kauaskantoisia vaikutteita. Vapaus huumorin äärellä onkin jotain täysin muuta. Kun huudamme ulkoisia rajoitteita vastaan, emme hahmota mitä kollektiivisesti sisällämme tapahtuu. Huumori linkittyy aina muuhun inhimilliseen elämään eikä sitä pidä käsittää erillisenä alueena (vrt. Billig 2005a, 4), josta rajoitukset ovat kadonneet. Huumorista tulee herkästi valtataistelua ja kollektiivista väkivaltaa (vrt. Morreall 2009, 102–105; Billig 2005b, 29), jos emme esimerkiksi uskalla avata silmiämme toisten humaaneille tarpeille ja toiveille. Frommille olennaista on, että vapaus ei koske pelkästään määrää vaan myös laatua. Vaikka tiettyjä ulkoisia rajoituksia on saatu poistettua, emme voi pysähtyä, koska ”meidän on päästävä uudenlaiseen vapauteen, joka mahdollistaa yksilöllisen minämme toteuttamisen, uskomme tähän minään ja elämään” (Fromm 1976b, 97).

Fromm tähdentääkin, että ihminen voi olla orja myös ilman kahleita. Yhteisön puolelta välittyvät ajatukset sitovat meitä vahvemmin kuin ulkoiset kahleet. Jokainen huomaa, jos hänellä on rautapallo jalassa, mutta tilanne on paljon haastavampi, jos elämme sen harhakuvitelman kanssa, että olemme vapaita. (Fromm 1993, 21.) Yksi yksilöllisen minän löytämisen ja toteuttamisen edellytyksiä on, että alamme tarkastella huumoria muutoinkin kuin liberaalina hui-pentumana. On ymmärrettävä, että huumorintaju kehittyi sosiaalisissa suhteissa (vrt. Kuipers 2006, 7–8) ja että huumorilla on muitakin vaikutuksia kuin vain naurun herättäminen. Vaikka riemu tuntuu hetkellisesti hyvältä, tämä hyvänolon tai huvittuneisuuden tunne ei yksistään ole ratkaiseva tekijä hauskuutta arvioidessamme. Meidän on nähtävä huumorin ilmiänsua pidemmälle. Tällöin voimme alkaa riisua sisäisiä kahleitamme.

Usein silti ajatellaan, että esimerkiksi huumorintaju on aina yksilöllinen, ja että me emme voi vaikuttaa siihen, mikä meitä huvittaa (esim. Smuts 2010). Tässä mielessä meillä ei ole mahdollisuutta valita omaa huumorintajuamme. Frommia seuraten tulkitsen, että meillä on vapaus katsoa naurun taakse. Me voimme pohtia huvituksia ja hekottelua sekä niiden muodostamaa suhdetta muihin ihmisiin ja yhteisöön. Meillä on vapaus suhtautua huumoriin vakavasti ja silti iloita maailmassa esiintyvistä hassuista sattumuksista.

Kun kerran huumorintajumme ei ole vapaasti valittavissa, sallimmeko sen pakottaa meidät nauramaan kaikelle mahdolliselle? Onko tämä vapautta? Keskeinen huomio on, että nauru ei välttämättä vielä ole vapaata, vaikka mikään selkeä valtaapitävä taho ei määrittäisikään hyväksyttävän huumorin aiheita.

Fromm analysoikin modernia yhteiskuntaa ja huomauttaa, että olemme varsin ylpeitä siitä, että meillä ei ole ulkoisia auktoriteetteja tai että voimme ilmaista vapaasti ajatuksiamme ja tunteitamme. Edelleen uskomme, että nämä vapaudet takaavat automaattisesti yksilöllisyytemme. (Fromm 1976b, 202.) Muodollisten vapauksien pohjalta rakentuva näkyvä yksilöllisyydestä on kuitenkin harhainen. Frommin mukaan olemme lähinnä automaatteja, jotka jakavat illuusion siitä, että olemme täydellisen omaehtoisia yksilöitä (Fromm 1976b, 213). Vaikka huumorintaju onkin yksilöllinen, se on silti monella tapaa jaettu piirre. Inkongruenssiteoreetikoiden mukaan huumorissa on kyse käsitteellisten kategorisointien risteävyydestä, minkä myötä huumori on jo käsitteellisellä tasolla jaettava: meillä on suhteellisen samankaltainen käsitteekoneisto muiden kanssa, ja näiden kulttuuristen kategorisointien pohjalta huumoria tuotetaan. Samoin nauru on luonteeltaan sosiaalinen signaali, jolla ilmaistaan tilanteen mukaisesti vaikkapa riemua, hyväksyntää tai halveksuntaa. Giseline Kuipers kuvaa osuvasti, kuinka ymmärrämme yhteneväisen huumorintajun merkityksen vasta silloin, kun jakopintaa ei löydy: on mahdoton saada syvällistä yhteyttä ihmiseen, joka ei jaa kanssamme samanlaista huumorintajua (Kuipers 2006, 1). Edellistä seuraten saman komedian äärellä nauraminen osoittaa, että me teemme yhteneväisiä huumoritulkitintoja. Jaettu nauru toimii merkinä siitä, että suhtautumisemme havaittuihin käsittepoikkeamiin on ainakin jossain määrin samankaltainen muiden kanssa. Frommia tulkiten voisi kärjistää, että yhteinen nauru on merkki siitä, että olemme kulttuurisella tasolla sopivissa määrin ojenuksessa (vrt. Bergson 1994).

Intuitiivisesti ajatellen jokaisen oma huumorintaju on ainutlaatuinen ja paras mahdollinen: ”Minä tiedän, mitä minä pidän hauskana.” Frommin ajattelun valossa tämä käsitys on kuitenkin mielestäni ongelmallinen. Vaikka kuvittelemme olevamme yksilöitä, me toistuvasti ajattelemme ja tunnemme juuri siten kuin meidän oletetaan ajattelevan ja tuntevan. Kuten Kuipers osuvasti tähden-tää, yksilön maku huumorin suhteen kehittyy aina sosiaalisen tilanteen puitteissa ja sitä myöten huumorintajuun kohdistuu jatkuvasti paineita ulkoapäin (Kuipers 2006, 14). Me omaksumme kulttuuristen mekanismien myötä kykymme nauraa; ja se mille me nauramme, riippuu laajasti ottaen yhteiskunnallisista olosuhteista. Jos esille tuodaan jotain täysin käsittämätöntä tai jotain millä ei ole mitään yhteyttä meidän elinpiiriimme, naurun herättäminen on vaikeaa. Meidän on kyettävä tunnistamaan huumori. Näin ollen, kun nauramme kulttuurisia konventioita vastaan sotiville poikkeamille, nauru on arvolatautunut ilmaus. Se ilmaisee, että naurettavassa asiassa ei ole kaikki aivan kohdillaan.

Edelleen on muistettava, että vapaus on eri asia kuin kaikkien mahdollisten mielijohteiden toteuttaminen (Fromm 1993, 47). Silti me herkästi kuvittelemme, että jokaisen päänäpiston esteetön toteuttaminen on suurinta vapautta, ja tämä näkyy myös suhteessa huumoriin. Joillakin ihmisillä on pakottava

tarve kajauttaa keksimänsä huvittavat huomiot ilmoille ja metsästää nauruja läsnäolijoilta. Tällöin vitsailija ei sen kummemmin mieti yleisöään tai että loukkaako hänen kujeensa jotakuta. Tällainen pakottavien sisäisten puuskien seuraaminen saatetaan kokea vapautena, vaikka Frommin ajattelun valossa syväliempää vapautta on, että voimme harkita sanomisiamme. Kun huumori ymmärretään sosiaalisena suhteena, olennaiseksi tulee, että kaikkea omasta mielestä hauskaa ei ole pakko ilmaista ääneen. Fromm katsookin, että hetkellisille päähänpinttymille tyypillistä on etsiä vastausta kysymykseen ”miksi ei”, mikä ei varsinaisesti ilmaise syytä asian tekemiseen vaan sen, ettei ole mitään syytä olla tekemättä sitä (Fromm 1993, 47).

Vapauden äärellä hilpeys on kavala seuralainen. Me huvitumme monista asioista ja nautimme tästä tunteesta. Billigin mukaan huvista on tullut imperatiivi nykyisessä yhteiskunnassa, ja näitä hupeja nautimme kaiken aikaa (Billig 2005a, 13). Ratkaisevaa olisikin, miten suhtaudumme koettuun hupiiin. Mitä tapahtuu naurun jälkeen? Auttaako huumori näkemään asiat uudessa valossa vai sumentaako se näköalamme? Fromm on humanistisen toiveikas ja kaiken kritiikin äärellä hän uskoo, että meillä yhteisöllisistä vaikuttimista huolimatta on mahdollisuus olla yksilöitä ja – inhimillisissä puitteissa – vapaita. Täten myös huumori voi edistää inhimillistä vapautta. Huumorin myötä me voimme esimerkiksi tunnustaa maailman moninaisuuden ja käsitteidemme vajavaisuuden ja että maailma on kummallisuudessaan riemullinen paikka. Me voimme antaa maailman yllättää ja ihmetyttää aina uudelleen ja uudelleen. Huumori muistuttaa inhimillisistä rajoituksista, mikä on edellytys sille, että voimme ylipäätään alkaa rakentaa humaania vapautta.

Fromm pohjaakin vapauskäsitteensä muun muassa Spinozan näkemyksiin:

Jotta emme kuoleutuisi, meidän on pyrittävä kohti 'ihmisluonnon ihannetta', meidän on toisin sanoen oltava niin vapaita, järjestäviä ja aktiivisia kuin suinkin. Meidän on tultava siksi mitä voimme olla. Kyse on toisin sanoen siitä hyvästä, joka on mahdollisuutena olemassa ihmisluonnossa. (Fromm 1977, 142.)

Frommille hyvää on se, mikä palvelee elämää sekä kasvua, ja toisaalta pahaa se, mikä tukahduttaa ja kaventaa elämää (Fromm 1976a, 431). Huumori voi toimia niin hyvässä kuin pahassa.

Kaiken kaikkiaan Frommin ajattelun valossa huumorin vapaus voidaan käsittää kattavammin kuin pelkkänä huumorin sisäisenä vapautena tai vitsisäältäöjen esteettömyytenä. Tietysti pinnallisesti tarkasteltuna maailma on huumorin ja vapauden tyysija: meille tarjotaan hauskuutuksia tauotta päivästä ja tiedotusvälineestä toiseen. Me voimme itse määrätä, jäämmekö kotiin katsomaan Simpsonia vai lähdemmekö toimistolle kirjoittamaan filosofista artikkelia huumorin luonteesta. Frommin ajattelun valossa jatkuva huvituksiin uppoutuminen ei kuitenkaan ole vapautta vaan ennemminkin turruttavaa ja usein vain pakoa omasta inhimillisestä, sietämättömästä tilanteesta. Neil Postman on jatkanut ajatuskulkua teoksessaan *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, jonka dystooppinen näkymä median läpikotaisesta viihteellistymisestä mukailee Aldous Huxleyn ironista huomiota: älä koskaan siirrä huomiseen sitä hupia, minkä voit ko-

kea tänään (Postman 2006). Silti frommilaisessa katsannossa huumorissa piilee toiveikkuutta. Huumori voi olla myös kumouksellista edellyttäen, että se on yhteydessä humaaneihin arvoihin ja kunnioittaa ihmisyyttä laajassa mitassa. Toisten kärsimyksillä revittelevä huumori on helposti tuhoavaa ja latistavaa, mutta humoristilla on myös mahdollisuus kunnioittaa elämänmyönteistä ihmisyyttä.

Keskeiseksi kysymykseksi nousee, edistääkö huumori vapautta? Vai kahlitseeko se meidät?

Fromm ja huumorin vakavat kasvot

Nykyisellä huumorin kultakaudella, kun televisio suoltaa komedioita ja YouTube täyttyy koomisista videoista, saattaa unohtua, että huumoria ei voi olla ilman vakavaa. Inkongruenssi- eli yhteensopimattomuusteorian ydinhuomio on, että mikään ei ole naurettavaa itsessään, mutta toisaalta mikä tahansa inhimillinen seikka voidaan esittää koomisessa valossa (ks. Kinnunen 1994, 24). Läpikotaisin naurettava maailma on mahdottomuus, koska elämässä on oltava jokin kiintopiste, johon naurettavuuksia verrataan. Kaiken totalisoiva nauru merkitsisi kaaosta, jossa merkitykset katoavat eikä kiinnekohtia enää ole. Totaalisen naurun maailmassa ei ole enää huumoria.

Mihail Bahtinin mukaan karnevaaleissa ruumiillistuu ajatus naurun totaalisesti läpäisemästä maailmasta. Karnevaaleissa on kyse ”kaikkien hierarkkisten suhteiden, etuoikeuksien, normien ja kieltojen” kumoamisesta. Karnevaaleissa kaikki nauravat kaikelle ilman rajoituksia, nauru kohdistuu koko ympäröivään maailmaan ja naurajiin itseensä. (Bahtin 2002, 7–10.) Karnevaalien funktio toteutuu kuitenkin ainoastaan hetkellisesti. Olli Alho on täsmentänyt, että vaikka karnevaalikäyttäytyminen on ilmitasoltaan norminvastaista, on tämä norminvastaisuus itsessään normatiivista. Naurujuhla ei tällöin toimi vapauttavana kritiikkinä vaan olemassa olevien arvojen pönkittäjänä, kun ihmiset huomaavat, että täydellisessä kaaoksessa on mahdoton elää. Järjestyksen ja epäjärjestyksen väliltä on lopulta valittava järjestys. (Alho 1988, 88–91, 96.) Samoin Seppo Knuuttila esittää, että karnevaalien nurinkäännetty maailma auttaa erityisesti ymmärtämään vallan ja hierarkioiden muuttumattomuuden (Knuuttila 1992, 205–206).

Edellisen valossa huumori kietoutuu kiinteästi yhteen vakavuuden kanssa. Tässä suhteessa on syytä pohtia, millä tavoin nykyaikainen huumori kommentoi vakavaa, ja mihin lähtöoletuksiin se kiinnittyy? Mitä kaikkea näkyy naurun takana? Millaisia arvoja huumori edistää?

Yksi väylä tarkastella ilakoinnin takana piileviä asenteita avautuu, kun Frommia seuraten erotellaan *ilo* ja *hupi* (ks. Fromm 1977, 139–143). Frommille ilo on vitsien veistelyn sijaan laajempi asenne, se liittyy elämänilon levittämiseen. Hupi taas on välitöntä huvituksetunteen metsästämistä. Esimerkiksi halu saattaa toiset naurunalaiseksi ja heidän naurettavuudellaan riemuitseminen on humanistisessa mielessä tuomittavaa, vaikka tuollainen huvittelu voikin joidenkin mielestä olla hauskaa. Frommin katsannossa hupi saattaa jopa tappaa

ilon. Fromm täsmentää, että näiden kahden vastakkainasettelu kärjistyy modernissa maailmassa, jossa "ilo, voimakkaan elämäntunnon ilmaus, saa vastineekseen hauskuuden tai jännityksen". (Fromm 1976a, 414.)

Fromm on vakuuttunut, että kaikkialla versovista huveista huolimatta me tosiasiassa painiskelemme ikävystyneisyyden kanssa. Jälleen huumori ja nauru näyttäytyvät petollisina nautinnon lähteinä, ja Fromm haluaa nähdä naurun ja hymyn taakse. Se, miltä me näytämme, ei ole sama asia kuin mitä me olemme. Ilmitasolla ilon ja hovin erottaminen ei kuitenkaan aina ole selkeää, koska me elämme "ilottomien huvien maailmassa" (Fromm 1977, 139). Esimerkiksi kulttuurisissa konventioissa hymyily yleensä tulkitaan myönteiseksi merkiksi, mutta Frommin mukaan hymy on toistuvasti ainoastaan naamio, jolla pyritään peittämään ihmisen todelliset pyrkimykset (Fromm 1977, 118). Huumorista tulee tällöin hyväntuulinen väline, jolla pyritään oikeuttamaan esimerkiksi vähemmistöjen sortamista (vrt. Billig 2005b) tai toisaalta paetaan ajalle tyypillistä ikävystyneisyyttä ja tyhjyyttä.

Vaikka Frommin katsannossa me kamppailemme ikävystyneisyyden kanssa, saattaa huvitus olla hyvin voimakas tuntemus (Fromm 1977, 139). Ongelma on kuitenkin siinä, että tällainen pikainen hovin kautta tyydyttyminen ei liity laajemmin ihmisen aktiivisuuteen ja omaehtoisuuteen. Hupi onkin enemmän passivoivaa, kun tuijotamme sanonnan mukaisesti aivot narikassa viihdeohjelmia tai hakeudumme varta vasten nauramaan koomikoiden keikoille. Huvitusten aiheuttama nauru tuntuu hillittömän hyvältä mutta saattaa inhimillisessä kokonaiskuvassa olla ainoastaan asioiden peittelyä tai yritys unohtaa kalvava synkkyys.

Frommia seuraten nauru on ekstaattinen kokemus, jonka avulla saavutamme huipun. Frommille olennainen kysymys on kuitenkin, minkä huipun? Voimme tarjota listalle vaikkapa kiihkon, huumauksen tai tyydytyksen korkeimman pisteen, mutta se ei vielä riitä. Jos naurumme on sidoksissa inhimillistä elämää sortaviin järjestelmiin, se ei vastaa millään tapaa inhimillisiin ongelmiin. Frommille näihin kysymyksiin vastaaminen on tärkeämpää kuin pinnallinen hekottelu. (Fromm 1977, 139–140.)

Radikaalihedonistin nautinnot, ahneuden tyydyttäminen yhä uusin tavoin ja nyky-yhteiskunnan suomat hovit synnyttävät kaikki eriasteista kiihottumista. Mutta ne eivät tuota iloa. Itse asiassa juuri ilon puute pakottaa meidät etsimään yhä uusia ja jatkuvasti kiihottavampia nautintoja. (Fromm 1977, 140.)

Naurun väitetään olevan terapiaa, ja nyky-yhteiskunta haluaa uskoa huumorin suurenmoisiin voimiin (Billig 2005a, 21), mutta Frommia seuraten tulkitsen, että ne saattavatkin olla ainoastaan pikatehoisia pillereitä, jotka auttavat hetkeksi unohtamaan oireet mutta eivät vaikuta ongelmien syvempiin syihin. Arjessa meille tyrkytetään kulttuurituotteita, jotka ovat lähinnä passivoivia. Moninaiset televisio-ohjelmat voivat tuottaa hupia ja jännitystä, mutta ne eivät Frommin katsannossa tyypillisesti tuo mukanaan iloa. Frommille ilon edellytys on humanistinen vapaus. (Fromm 1976a, 353.)

Huvista poiketen ilo ei ole Frommille mikään huippukokemus, joka päättyy yhtä nopeasti kuin on alkanutkin. Pikemminkin ilo on suhteellisen pysyvä

tunnetila, joka liittyy ihmisen kykyjen ilmaisemiseen. "Ilo ei ole hetken hurmioita. Ilo on sitä hehkua, joka säestää olemista." (Fromm 1977, 140.) Parhaimmillaan huumori, nauru ja hymy säestävät iloa. Siltikään meidän ei pidä kuvitella, että kaikki naurua nostattava olisi hyvästä. Ilonkin on oltava yhteydessä humanistisiin, elämänmyönteisiin ajatuksiin. Fromm kutsuu tätä *biofiliseksi asenteeksi*, mikä tarkoittaa pohjimmiltaan kaiken elämän rakastamista ja halua edistää kasvua. (Fromm 1976a, 431.) Ilon sävyttämä huumori on alttiutta tarkastella maailmaa uusista ja yllättävistä näkökulmista eikä pelkästään tyytymistä valmiiksi naurettuihin komedioihin.

Yleisellä tasolla biofilisistä asennoituvana humoristi nauttii maailmasta ja löytää sieltä aina jotain uutta ihmeteltävää. Tällöin huumori muistuttaa käsitte-rakennelmiemme häilyvyydestä, mikä koetaan kuitenkin ennemmin mahdollisuutena seikkailuun ja uuden löytämiseen kuin uhkana. Humanistinen humoristi haluaa naurattaa ja levittää iloa, hän suhtautuu muihin ihmisiin suuremmoisella kunnioituksella eikä hänellä ole itsekkäitä taka-ajatuksia.

Mutta kuten toistuvasti todettua, huumoria voidaan käyttää myös alistamiseen, rankaisemiseen ja vanhojen piintyneiden käsitysten pönkittämiseen. Konservatiivi nauraa uudelle ja oudolle peloissaan. Hän yrittää väkisin pitää ympärilleen kasaamaansa maailmankuvaa koossa ja rukoilee, ettei turvaa tuova saippuakupla puhkea. Huumori on tällöin suojautumisväline ulkopuolelta tulevia uhkia vastaan.

Jotta ymmärtäisimme, mitä humoristisessa esityksessä tapahtuu, tulee huumoria tarkastella suhteessa laajempaan sosiaaliseen kehikkoon. Kuten Serafim Seppälä (2012, 8) muistuttaa, kaikkialla huumori karrikoi sitä, mikä on elämässä keskeistä. Tällöin pelkkä sananvapauden puolustaminen ei riitä, mutta toisaalta kyseenalaisten vitsiäiheiden moralisoiva tuomitseminen ei sekään ole uskottavaa. Vaikeistakin aiheista voidaan tehdä huumoria. Kyse on aina näkökulmista: mitä huumori esittää ja millaisessa valossa, mihin sillä pyritään? Asenteiden tai intentioiden esiin kaivaminen on kiistatta haastavaa yksittäisten vitsien kohdalla, eikä nauru aina tottele teorioita. Tästä kumpuaakin koko huumorintutkimuksen vastaanpanematon kiehtovuus. Meidän on uskallettava puolustaa humaaneja arvoja, vaikka muut ympärillä tikahtuisivat nauruunsa.

Milloin huumori sitten on hyvää tai pahaa? Frommilaisittain tulkittuna hyvää on se, mikä palvelee elämää ja pahaa se, mikä palvelee kuolemaa. Hyvän alle lukeutuu elämän kunnioittaminen ja kaikki se, mikä edistää elämää ja kasvua. Pahaa on puolestaan se, mikä leikkelee elämän palasiksi ja tukahduttaa kasvun. (Fromm 1976a, 431.) Yhtäläillä huumori voi palvella kumpaakin tarkoitusta. Yksinään, inhimillisestä elämästä eristettynä, huumori ei kuulu hyvän saati pahan piiriin.

Mistä sitten tiedämme, milloin huumori poikii iloa, milloin hupia? Tämä on haastavaa, kun teollisuuden alat ovat valjastaneet humanistiset toiveet omaan käyttöön:

Teollisessa yhteiskunnassa viralliset, tiedostetut arvot ovat uskonnollista ja humanistista perinnettä: yksilöllisyys, rakkaus, myötätunto, toivo, jne. – – Inhimillistä käyttäytymistä suoranaisesti motivoivat arvot ovat syntyisin byrokraattisen teollisen yh-

teiskunnan sosiaalisesta järjestelmästä: omistus, kulutus, sosiaalinen asema, hauskuus, viehtymys jne. (Fromm 1969, 112.)

Vaikka elämme jälkiteollisessa yhteiskunnassa, on Frommin tarjoama kritiikki edelleen kohdallista. Hänen tulkinnassaan esimerkiksi onnellisuus viittaa usein pinnalliseen tyydytyksen tilaan eikä niinkään aitoon, syvään inhimillisen kokemisen tilaan: "Voitaisiinkin sanoa, että 'onnellisuus' on vierautunut muoto iloa." (Fromm 1969, 151.)

Huumorin humanistinen ydin

Arkisessa kielenkäytössä huumorista tehdään helposti jähmeä objekti, kun esitetään, että huumori ja sananvapaus ovat erottamaton pari ja että niitä ei pidä kahlita. Kuitenkin huumori rakentuu ristiriitojen tai vertailujen pohjalta, joten se on aina asetettava suhteisiinsa. Tällöin huumorissa on kyse elävästä, inhimillisestä elämänmuodosta ja tavasta tarkastella maailmaa. Kiinnostavampaa onkin, miten me suhtaudumme huumorin esittämiin ristiriitoihin. Huumorin esittämä todellisuus on konflikteja täynnä ja nauru muistuttaa riemullisella tavalla, että meidän käsitteistömme ei ole lopullinen eikä muuttumaton. Maailma on absurdi paikka ja ehtymätön hauskuuden lähde. Tässä mielessä huumorissa piilee kriittistä potentiaalia. Yhteisöllisellä tasolla huumori voi huokua traagista toiveikkaudesta, kun se toimii vastarintana ahdistaville oloille. Täten huumori linkittyy humanistisiin arvoihin ja tarkastelee maailmaa niiden varaan rakentuvasta näkökulmasta.

Hauskuus voidaan kuitenkin ottaa haltuun, jolloin kriittinen momentti muuttuu konservatiiviseksi. Kulttuurisesti hallittu huumori sanelee, millaisille asioille kussakin ajassa nauretaan. Vaikka huumorin voi ajatella koettelevan rajoja, huumorilla on laajemmassa mielessä aina kulttuuriset rajat. Se on aina sidottu hetkeen ja yhteisöön, koska me emme pääse täydellisesti käsitteistöämme pakoon edes huumorissa.

Huumori-ilmiön ymmärtäminen vaatii, että se linkitetään inhimillisen olemassaolon ehtoihin. Jos kaikki pyritään tekemään naurunalaiseksi keinolla millä hyvänsä, me kadotamme viitekehiksemme emmekä voi enää tuntea oloamme kotoisaksi maailmassa. Tällaista juurettomuutta vastaan suuntautuu Erich Frommin filosofia. Tämän filosofian puitteissa on pyrittävä paikantamaan elämänmyönteinen keskitie. Huumoriton ja nauruton maailma on iloton, ja ilo puolestaan on keskeisessä osassa inhimillistä hyvinvointia. Nauru ja huumori ovat ehto järjissä pysymiselle, vaikka ne voidaan valjastaa myös hivin airueksi, jolla lähinnä paetaan kalvavaa ikävyyttä.

Karnevaalipohdinnat muistuttavat, että totaalisen naurun maailma ei ole mahdollinen, mutta inhimillistä elämänmuotoa ei palvele myöskään täydellisen käsitteellistetty maailma, jossa ei ole yllätyksiä tai poikkeamia. Ihmisyyteen liittyy väistämättä aina kasvu ja muutos. Ilman muutosta ihminen kuihtuu. Kaikki elämä ja elävä on muutosta. Tähän muutokseen ja häilyvyyteen lopulta perustuu myös se, että ylipäätään voi olla huumoria.

Huumori-ilmiötä pitäisikin tarkastella laajemmassa valossa, pohtia sen vaikutuksia koko sosiaalisen yhteisön tasolla. Pelkkä sananvapauden puolustaminen ei tällöin riitä, eikä kyseenalaisten aiheiden moralisoiva tuomitseminen ole uskottavaa. Huumorissa on kyse aina näkökulmista. Sen vuoksi on tarkasteltava, mitä huumori esittää ja millaisessa valossa, mihin sillä pyritään.

Edelleen on pidettävä mielessä, että nauru ei vielä paljasta kaikkea kohteestaan: jos me naurahdamme vitsille, jossa ilmenee väkivaltaa, ei tästä voida päätellä, että olisimme väkivallan puolestapuhujia. Ihmisten tarkoituserät ovat hyvin moninaisia. Jotta tarkempia yksilöluonteen määritelmiä voitaisiin antaa, olisi tunnettava vitsi kokonaisuudessaan, mikä tarkoittaa esimerkiksi kertomishetkeä, naurajan suhdetta muihin paikalla oleviin ja niin edelleen. Eli on tunnettava vitsin kertomiskonteksti (Billig 2005b, 32). Kuten Kuipers esittää, vitsinkerronta on ytimeltään kommunikatiivista toimintaa, jossa sosiaalisilla olosuhteilla on kriittinen merkitys (Kuipers 2006, 41–43).

Yksittäiset vitsitkin tulisi yrittää nähdä kokonaiskuvassa. Frommin eettinen linjaus huumorin suhteen on selkeä – biofilisen etiikan pohjalta hyvää on se, mikä palvelee elämää ja pahaa se, mikä palvelee tuhoa ja kuolemaa. Tämän esityksen pohjalta ei voida kuitenkaan tuomita yksittäisiä vitsiaiheita lähtökohdaisesti pahoiksi. Jos joku koomikko vitsaileekin jostain rankasta aiheesta, kuten kansanmurhasta tai raiskauksesta, ei pelkän aiheen nimissä vielä voida tuomita häntä moraalisisessa mielessä. Tarkastelukulman on oltava laajempi: kuinka hän suhtautuu käsiteltävään aiheeseen, miten hän esittää sen, mitä tarkoituseriä hän ajaa jutullaan ja niin edelleen. Jos tarkoituksena on trivialisoida raiskaus sekä mitätöidä tragedian uhrin kokemukset ja siinä samalla kalastaa nauruja toisten loukkaantuessa, on vitsailija kyseenalaisilla poluilla.

Vaikeita asioita voi käsitellä kuitenkin humoristisessa esityksessä huumaanilla tavalla. Esimerkiksi juutalaisperinteessä vitsaillaan toistuvasti vainoihin liittyvillä asioilla. Näissä kaskuissa kaikuu inhimillinen toiveikkuus, traaginen luottamus kanssaihmiisiin ja palo elämään (ks. Spalding 2001, xiv). Naurusta tulee tällöin humaania ja elämää edistävää. Esimerkiksi:

Tsaarinajan Venäjällä juutalaispogromit olivat pahimmillaan. Kyliä tuikattiin tuleen, miehiä vietiin ammuttaviksi.

Eräässäkin pienessä kylässä juutalaiset oli koottu joukoksi. Ryhmä taivalsi jonossa ylijäisen pellon kohti metsää. Tasaisin väliajoin horisontissa kajahti laukaus, ja jono askelsi eteenpäin. Kaikki tiesivät, mitä tuleman piti. Yksi nuori juutalainen kääntyi vanhemman juutalaisen puoleen ja sanoi:

– Hei, tässä ei ole kuin kaksi vartijaa. Jos me nyt lähdetään juoksemaan, saattaa olla, että me pelastaudutaan.

Toinen juutalainen sihahti kiivaasti:

– Shh, älä nyt aiheuta mitään harmeja!³

Kun vitsi tai humoristinen huomio revitään kertomis- tai kokemishetkestään, katoaa jotain. Niinpä iltapäivälehtien ”Näin törkeän vitsin koomikko kertoi” -otsikot vain harvoin esittävät tilanteen kokonaiskuvan. Ne irrottavat ja muuttavat – elleivät jopa tuhoa – koko koomisen kokemuksen. Pinnallisella tasolla ylläolevan vitsin suhteen voidaan tehdä seuraavanlainen erittely. Ensinnäkin vitsissä tapetaan juutalaisia, ja toiseksi siinä osoitetaan, että juutalaiset ovat höl-

möjä jopa oman tuhonsa edessä. Tällaisen erittelyn pohjalta vitsi näyttäytyy julmana. Voisi helposti väittää, että kyseessä on antisemitistinen ja rasistinen vitsi.

Edellinen erittely ei kuitenkaan nosta esiin vitsin kertojan ja kuulijan välistä suhdetta, tai sanojen ilmipinnan takana hämmöttävää ulottuvuutta. Vitsi muistuttaa kammottavasta inhimillisyydestä, vuosituhansien vainosta ja silti kaiken tämän historian jälkeen kukoistavasta luottamuksesta, joka meillä on toisiimme. Se huokuu uskoa ihmisyyteen. Vitsin vanhempi juutalainen kaikista kauhukuvista huolimatta luottaa siihen, että omat ystävät ja naapurit eivät oikeasti ole niin pahoja, että tappaisivat heidät. Hän uskoo, että asiat kääntyvät vielä parhain päin. Näin kuvattuna tarinaa on hivenen vaikeampi pitää rasistisena. Tietenkin se, mikä vitsin osatekijä mahdollisesti huvittaa lukijaa, vaihtelee yksilöiden välillä. Huumori voi joka tapauksessa nostattaa ajattelevaa naurua ja laittaa meidät miettimään.

Korkeimmillaan huumori saa antautumaan ilolle. Tällöin huumorin ei välttämättä tarvitse palvella mitään erityistarkoitusta, vaan se kaappaa mukaansa. Tässä momentissa vapaus, huumori ja ilo kietoutuvat toisiinsa sekä elämänmyönteiseen asennoitumiseen. Fromm lainaa buddhalaisen filosofian professori D. T. Suzukia: ”Juuri tätä on vapaus: sydämessä piilevien luovien ja hyväntahtoisten impulssien vapauttamista leikkiin.” (Fromm 2012, 145).

Humanististen arvojen mukaisessa huumorissa yksilö tunnistaa yhteytensä muihin ihmisiin ja huomaa, että oma hetkellinen riemu ei enää olekaan kaikkein ratkaisevin tekijä. Vapautta on se, että pystyy kunnioittamaan muita ja muiden näkökulmia. Vapautta ei ole se, että huutaa kaiken mahdollisen hauskan, mitä mieleen juolahtaa. Frommia seuraten voidaan tiivistää, että olennaista ei ole se ”mitä ajatellaan, vaan miten ajatellaan” (Fromm 1976b, 171). Jos me kuvittelemme, että saavutamme vapauden vitsailemalla kaikesta mahdollisesta jatkuvasti, olemme tosiasiasa kahlittuja. Äärimmilleen venytetty vaatimus huumorin vapaudesta näyttäytyykin sosiaalisena pakkona. Sen sijaan meillä on oltava mahdollisuus pohtia humoristisuuttamme ja naurumme luonnetta. Tällöin voimme nähdä hauskuutta pidemmälle. Huumorin suhteen vapautta on se, että ei tarvitse nauraa kaikelle väkisin.

Spontaani huumori ja ilo ovat parhaimmillaan suurenmoisia elementtejä. Pienillä eleillä ja kujeilla me rakennamme yhteistä elämää, teemme maailmasta riemukkaamman ja hersyvemmän. Spontaani huumori elää hetkessä, ihmisissä, tilanteessa. Huumorin korkein päämäärä on tuottaa iloa, mutta siltikään huumorille ei pidä asettaa erityistä tehtävää. Jos huumori valjastetaan etukäteen tietoisesti palvelemaan jotain erillistä tarkoitusta, se muuttuu välineeksi ja alkaa vaikuttaa falskilta. Huumorilla on turha yrittää tehdä vallankumousta, koska huumori ei toimi siten.

Huumori synnyttää iloa, mutta sillä on valtaisa joukko muitakin seurauksia. Olennaista on, millaista asennetta huumori ja huumorinkäyttö heijastelevat. Humoristi tarkastelee maailmaa erityisestä näkökulmasta ja onnistuu jakamaan huomionsa hersyvällä tavalla muillekin. Tällöin hauskuus on linjassa inhimillisen olemisen kanssa.

Jos vitsin veistelijä ajattelee, että hän haluaa koetella hyvän maun rajoja tai testata sananvapauden asemaa, hän on valjastanut huumorin välineelliseen käyttöön. Jotkut väittävät, että huumorin avulla voidaan purkaa paineita tai että nauru pidentää ikää tai että vitsailu pitää mielen virkeänä. Frommia seura-
ten esitän kuitenkin, että huumorilla ei ole välineellistä tarkoitusta. Huumori ei ole jotakin, jota pitäisi tuottaa ja kuluttaa. Tosin vaikka huumorilla ei ole tällais-
ta välineellistä tarkoitusta, se ei kuitenkaan ole merkityksetöntä. Ennemmin huumori osoittaa, kuinka me suhtaudumme maailmaan inhimillisten olemas-
saolon ehtojen puitteissa. Huumori on osa maailmankuvaa ja tapa olla suhteessa muihin.

VIITTEET

1. Ironista, että Billig käyttää omista tutkimuksissaan Frommia olkinukkena, joskin ainoas-
taan Herbert Marcusen yhden teoksen pohjalta. Billigin lähdeluettelossa ei Frommin kirjoja
mainita. Tarkemmin Frommiin tutustumalla hän saattaisi jopa jakaa Frommin yhteiskunta-
filosofisen kritiikin huumoria ja naurua kohtaan.
2. Artikkelini on kirjoitettu marraskuussa 2014, minkä johdosta siinä ei käsitellä tammikuun
2015 Charlie Hebdo -tragediaa.
3. Kiitän tästä vitsistä ja mietteiden inspiroimisesta Stan Saanilaa.

LÄHTEET JA KIRJALLISUUS

- Alho, Olli 1988. *Hulluuden puolustus ja muita kirjoituksia naurun historiasta*. Helsinki: WSOY.
- Bahtin, Mihail 2002/1965. *François Rabelais – Keskiajan ja renessanssin nauru*. Suom. Tapani Laine ja Paula Nieminen. Helsinki: LIKE.
- Bergson, Henri 1994/1900. *Nauru. Tutkimus komiikan merkityksestä*. Suom. Sanna Isto ja Marko Pasanen. Helsinki: Loki-Kirjat.
- Billig, Michael 2005a. *Laughter and Ridicule. Towards a Social Critique of Humour*. Lontoo: SAGE Publications.
- Billig, Michael 2005b. Comic Racism and Violence. Teoksessa Sharon Lockyer & Michael Pickering (toim.), *Beyond a Joke: The Limits of Humour*. Basingstone, Palgrave Macmillan, 25–44.
- Chapman, Graham; Cleese, John; Gilliam, Terry; Idle, Eric; Jones, Terry; Palin, Michel & McCabe, Bob 2008/2003. *Monty Pythonin maailma Monty Pythonin mukaan*. Suom. Tapani Kärkkäinen. Helsinki: LIKE.
- Freud, Sigmund 1983/1905. *Vitsi ja sen yhteyks piilotajuntaan*. Suom. Mirja Rutanen. Helsinki: Love Kirjat.
- Fromm, Erich & D. T. Suzuki 2012/1960. *Zen ja psykoanalyysi*. Suom. Mika Pekkola ja Matti Rautaniemi. Helsinki: Basam Books.
- Fromm, Erich 1993/1989. *Omistamisesta olemiseen. Itsetiedostuksen teitä ja harhapolkuja*. Suom. Maarit Arppo. Helsinki: Kirjayhtymä.
- Fromm, Erich 1977/1976. *Olla vai omistaa?* Suom. Matti Kannosto. Helsinki: Kirjayhtymä.
- Fromm, Erich 1976a/1973. *Tuhoava ihminen*. Suom. Matti Kannosto. Helsinki: Kirjayhtymä.
- Fromm, Erich 1976b/1941. *Pako vapaudesta*. Suom. Markku Lahtela. Helsinki: Kirjayhtymä.
- Fromm, Erich 1969/1968. *Toivon vallankumous*. Suom. Ilse Koli. Helsinki: Kirjayhtymä.
- Grotjahn, Martin 1957. *Beyond Laughter*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Kierkegaard, Søren 1993/1884. *Päättävää epätieteellinen jälkikirjoitus*. Suom. Torsti Lehtinen. Helsinki: WSOY.
- Kinnunen, Aarne 1994. *Huumorin ja koomisen keskeneräinen kysymys*. Helsinki: WSOY.
- Knuuttila, Seppo 1992. *Kansanhuumorin mieli. Kaskut maailmankuvan aineksina*. Helsinki: SKS.
- Kuipers, Giseline 2006. *Good Humor, Bad Taste: A Sociology of the Joke*. Berliini: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Lockyer, Sharon & Pickering, Michael 2008. You must be joking: the sociological critique of humour and comic media. *Sociology Compass*, 2 (3), 808–820.
- Lockyer, Sharon & Pickering, Michael (toim.) 2005. *Beyond a Joke: The Limits of Humour*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Morreall, John 2009. *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

- Morreall, John 1983. *Taking Laughter Seriously*. Albany: SUNY.
- Mulkay, Michael 1988. *On Humour. Its Nature and Its Place in Modern Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Nevanlinna, Tuomas 1988. Aforismeja teemasta nauru ja valta. *Kantti* 1/1988.
- Platon 1986. *Lait*. Suom. Itkonen-Kaila, Thesleff, Anhava & Anttila. *Teokset VI*. Helsinki: Otava.
- Postman, Neil 2006/1985. *Amusing Ourselves to Death. Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Puukko, Martti & Susiluoto, Ilmari 2009. *Nauru pidentää tuomiota. Puolalais-venäläinen vitsimaaottelu*. Helsinki: Ajatus Kirjat.
- Seppälä, Serafim 2012. *Missä on liikaa, sieltä puuttuu jotakin*. Juutalaisen huumorin maailma. Helsinki: Kirjapaja.
- Smuts, Aaron 2010. The Ethics of Humor: Can Your Sense of Humor be Wrong? *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 13, 333–347.
- Spalding, Henry B. 2001. *Encyclopedia of Jewish Humor*. New York: Jonathan David Publishers.
- Sturkes, Paul 2010. Comedy as Freedom of Expression. *Journal of Documentation* 66(2), 279–293.
- The Guardian 2004. *Law to safeguard religion is no joke, warns Blackadder*, 7.12.2004. URL <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2004/dec/07/raceandreligion.broadcasting> (luettu tammikuussa 2015).

IV

KILPAILUN LÄPÄISEMÄ HUUMORI

by

Hietalahti, J.

Teoksessa S. Knuuttila, P. Hakamies ja E. Lampela (toim.) Kalevalaseuran 94. vuosikirja: Huumorin skaalat. Esitys, tyyli ja tarkoitus. SKS. 2015, 379–392.

Julkaistu SKS:n luvalla / Reproduced with permission by the publisher

Jarno Hietalahti

KILPAILUN LÄPÄISEMÄ HUUMORI

Lukuisat huumorikilpailut saavuttivat laajan yleisön mielenkiinnon Suomessa vuonna 2014. Ylen Prisma Studio paikansi Suomen hauskimman vitsin, Putous-ohjelmassa löydettiin tuotantokauden hauskin sketsihahmo, Naurun tasapainossa kisailtiin hauskimman stand up -koomikon tittelistä ja jatkumon huipentumana Ismo Leikola kruunattiin koko maailman hauskimmaksi ihmiseksi yhdysvaltalaisen Laugh Factoryn järjestämässä kisassa. Näiden tuotantojen pohjalta voidaan esittää, että nykyaikainen huumoria sävyttävä piirre on kilpailu.¹

Kilpailumomentti huumorin äärellä on otettu vastaan niin luontevasti, että siitä on tullut normaali viihteen muoto. Lehtien otsikoissa on hyväksyttävää ilmoittaa, että Ismo Leikola on maailman hauskin ihminen tai että liikka Kivi on Suomen hauskin koomikko. Näissä muotoiluissa välittyy ilmeinen viesti: huumori ja hauskuus voidaan asemoida objektiiviseen paremmuusjärjestykseen. ”Maailman hauskin ihminen” on sanatason tarkastelussa superlatiivi, eikä häntä hauskeempaa ole. Palaan tähän myöhemmin.

Artikkelissani tarkastelen edellä kuvattua huumori-ilmiötä ja peilaan sitä suhteessa humanistiseen huumorikäsitkseen. Näkemys linkittyy humanistiajattelijan Erich Frommin muotoilemaan kriittiseen yhteiskuntafilosofiaan (ks. toinen artikkelini tässä kirjassa). Teksti on myös läheisessä yhteydessä aikaisempiin tutkimuksiini huumorin parissa. Olen argumentoinut muun muassa, että huumori voi olla yksi väkivallan muoto (2010), haastanut näkemyksen itselle nauramisen moraalista ylevyydestä (tulossa) ja kritisoinut ajatusta, että huumorin tulisi aina rikkoa rajoja (2014). Kokonaisprojektini on siis aikalais-kriittistä yhteiskuntafilosofista analyysia kulttuurissa ilmenevistä huumorilmiöistä. Frankfurtin koulukunnan kriittisen teorian hengessä kyseenalaistan perusteettomia huumoriin liittyviä uskomuksia. Yleisellä tasolla tutkimukseni haastaa käsityksen, että huumori ja nauru ovat aina hyvää. Näkökulmaa sivuten Michael Billig (2005) on kritisoinut kärkevästi niin arkiajattelussa kuin akateemisissa tutkielmissakin vallitsevia huumoriuskomuksia. Hänen mukaansa esimerkiksi huumorin ja naurun terveyttä edistäviä vaikutuksia on suuresti liioiteltu.

Angloamerikkalaisen huumorintutkimuksen perinteen mukaisesti käytän huumoria yleiskäsitteenä, joka kattaa lukuisat alalajit farssista satiiriin. Tiedostan, että huumorin eri luokkien välillä on eroja, mutta artikkelin käsittelevän ja tilarajoitusten vuoksi en keskity tarkastelemaan näitä eroja sen tarkemmin. Käsitteellisellä tasolla tulkitsen huumorin yhteensopimattomuusteorian nykyaikaisten sovellusten valossa: huumorin ytimessä ovat kulttuuristen kategorisointien väliset risteymät. Huumorin tarkempiin teoreettisiin muotoiluihin voi tutustua esimerkiksi Victor Raskinin (2008) semantiikkaan paneutuvien tutkielmien puitteissa samoin kuin Matthew M. Hurleyn johtaman työryhmän (2011) analyysien äärellä. Koska tarkastelen yleistä ilmiötä, en tee tarkempia kulttuurintutkimuksellisia erittelyjä esimerkiksi komediaelokuvan ja stand up -

esityksen välille. Yleisesti ottaen humoristisessa esityksessä katsojalle esitetään jonkinlainen kulttuuristen kategorisointien välinen risteys. Tuotannolliselta kannalta erilaisten esitysten välillä on eronsa, mutta ne eivät ole ratkaisevan tärkeitä tämän artikkelin suhteen.

Yksinkertaistaen voidaan esittää, että huumori aiheuttaa huvituksen tunteita. Tässä mielessä hauskuus on suorassa yhteydessä huumoriin (en käsittele tässä esim. huumorin mahdollista epäonnistumista. Ks. Kinnunen 1994, 68). Tämän premissin pohjalta teen oletuksen, että huumorikilpailun katsoja äänestessään antaa äänensä hausimmaksi katsomalleen humoristille. Tässä valossa huumorikilpailujen lopputulosten esittely vaikuttaa loogiselta: eniten ääniä kerännyt on hauskin. Tällaiset väitteet ovat tietysti omiaan nostattamaan vastalauseita. Ihmisillä on tyypillisesti voimakas käsitys omasta huumorintajustaan – kukin nauraa oman huumorintajunsa mukaisesti, ja kunkin oma huumorintaju lienee jokaisen omasta mielestä paras. Tätä myöten, mikäli äänestystuloksissa hausimmaksi koomikoksi, sketsihahmoksi tai vitsiksi nousee jokin muu kuin oma suosikki, on yksilön mieltymyksen ja laajemman äänestystuloksen välillä ristiriita tai ainakin jännite. Yksilön mielestä hauskin ei olekaan hauskin. Palaan tähän osin näennäiseen jännitteeseen myöhemmin.

Artikkelin kolmas keskeinen käsite on huumorintaju, joka herkästi käsitetään jonkinlaiseksi yksilölliseksi, sisäsyntyiseksi hauskuuttamisen taidoksi ja taipumukseksi vitsailuun sekä kyvyksi ymmärtää huvittavia letkauksia. Muun muassa geenitutkimuksen piirissä huumorintaju noteerataan yleishyödyllisten ominaisuuksien listoilla, ja uskomuksena on, että huumorintajun geneettinen parantelu edistäisi kenen tahansa yksilön elämää (Buchanan & al., 2001). Vaikka geenitutkijoiden aikomus olisi hyvä, on käsitys problemaattinen. Yksi artikkelini keskeinen väite on, että huumorintajua ei voida käsittää puhtaana yksilöllisenä ominaisuutena, eikä se viittaa pelkästään kykyyn tuottaa tai ymmärtää hauskuutta.

Esimerkiksi Willibald Ruch on esittänyt, että huumorintajua tulisi tarkastella osana yksilön persoonallisuutta. Tällöin huumorintaju merkitsee kykyä havaita ja tulkita maailmassa esiintyviä ristiriitaisuuksia samoin kuin mahdollisuutta nauttia niistä. Persoonallisuus-ulottuvuus auttaa ymmärtämään, miksi eri ihmiset suhtautuvat eri tavoin huumoriin. Persoonallisuuden ja huumorintajun mukaisesti yksilö keksii, jakaa ja kanavoi erilaisia humoristisia oivalluksia. (Ruch 1998, 5, 11.) Toisin sanoen voidaan katsoa, että huumorintaju on yksilöllinen ilmaus ihmisen maailmankuvasta. Ruchin huomio on tärkeä, ja ajatusta voi kehittää vielä askeleen pidemmälle.

Huumorintajun yksilöllisen ulottuvuuden lisäksi tulisi tarkastella, kuinka tällaiset yksilölliset ominaisuudet rakentuvat sosiaalisessa kontekstissa ja ovat yhteneväisiä muiden yksilöiden vastaavien ominaisuuksien kanssa. Yhteiskuntafilosofisessa tutkimuksessa keskeistä onkin pohtia, millaisia yleisiä piirteitä ja yhteisiä orientoitumistapoja yhteisön jäsenillä on. Näin ollen yksilöllisiä eroja tärkeämpää on pyrkiä hahmottamaan, mikä ihmisiä yhdistää, jos haluamme ymmärtää kulttuuria ja vallitsevaa sosiaalista tilannetta. Tämän katsannon suh-

teen Giseline Kuipersin (2008, 2006) sosiologiset huumorintutkimukset ovat erittäin merkittäviä artikkelini kannalta.

Tiiviisti muotoillen jokaisella ihmisellä on yksilöllinen huumorintaju, mutta siitä huolimatta laajat ihmisjoukot nauravat yhteen ääneen samojen humorististen esitysten äärellä. Jo tämä pinnallinen havainto osoittaa, kuinka huumorintajussa on perustavanlaatuisia sosiaalisia elementtejä.

Vuoden 2014 huumorikilpailut

Artikkelini ydinidea perustuu havainnolle, että kilpailu on lävistänyt huumorin. Koska laajasti käsitettynä huumori on sosiaalisella tasolla jaettu ilmiö, myös huumoriproduktiot toimivat erityisinä ajankuvina. En väitä, että kaikki huumori olisi kilpailua, mutta ainakin alla esiteltävissä erityisissä huumoriesimerkeissä kilpailuelementti näyttäisi olevan keskeisessä roolissa.

Alkuvuodesta 2014 Prisma Studio (Yle 2014) etsi Suomen hauskin vitsiä ja löysikin sellaisen miltei 300 ehdokkaan joukosta. Asiantuntijoiden ja toimituksen tekemän kaksivaiheisen esikarsinnan jälkeen mukana oli kymmenen vitsiä. Finaaliäänestyksessä liki neljänneksen 4 000 äänestä kerännyt voittajavitsi menee näin:

Suomalainen ja japanilainen yritys päättivät järjestää vuosittain soutukilpailun 8-miehisiin joukkuein. Molemmat joukkueet harjoittelivat pitkään ja kovaa. Kun kilpailupäivä tuli, molemmat joukkueet olivat mielestään huippukunnossa, mutta japanilaiset voittivat ylivoimaisesti kilometrillä.

Tappion jälkeen suomalaisten joukossa vallitsi tappiomieliala. Yrityksen korkein johto päätti kuitenkin, että imagosyistä heidän olisi pakko voittaa seuraavan vuoden kisa. He asettivat projektiyhmän ratkaisemaan ongelmaa. Pitkien analyysien jälkeen ryhmä havaitsi, että japanilaisilla oli seitsemän soutajaa ja yksi mies peräsimessä kun taas suomalaisilla oli yksi soutaja ja seitsemän perämiestä.

Tässä kriisitilanteessa johto osoitti huomattavaa toimintakykyä. Päätettiin palkata konsultit tutkimaan oman joukkueen koostumusta. Muutaman kuukauden työn jälkeen asiantuntijat tulivat siihen johtopäätökseen, että joukkueessa oli liian monta ohjaajaa ja liian vähän soutajia. Asiantuntijoiden raportin perusteella yrityksen johto teki välittömästi muutoksia joukkueeseen. Nyt joukkueessa oli neljä perämiestä, kaksi yliperämiestä, joukkueenjohtaja ja soutaja. Lisäksi soutajan motivoimiseksi kehitettiin bonuspistejärjestelmä. ”Meidän on laajennettava hänen työnkuvaansa ja annettava hänelle enemmän vastuuta.”

Seuraavana vuonna japanilaiset voittivat kahdella kilometrillä. Suomalainen joukkue erotti soutajan huonoon työsuoritukseen vedoten, mutta maksoi kuitenkin bonuksen johdolle sen osoittamista ponnisteluista.

Ensi vuotta varten suomalaiset ovat nyt kehittämässä uutta venettä.

Vitsikilpailun puitteissa huumorin ja kilpailun välinen suhde ilmenee kahdella tasolla. Ensiksikin äänestämällä voidaan löytää Suomen hauskin vitsi, ja toiseksi voittajavitsissä ilmiselvästi irvaillaan kilpailutilanteelle. Täten kilpailu on läsnä sekä eräänlaisena mittarina hauskuudelle että hauskuuden temaattisena ominaisuutena.

Syksyllä 2014 käynnistyi Putous-sarjan kuudes tuotantokausi. Putouksen keskeinen idea on, että jokainen ohjelmassa esiintyvä koomikko luo itselleen iskulauseista tunnetun sketsihahmon. Hahmot kisaavat viikottain keskenään ja yleisö äänestää omat suosikkinsa jatkoon. Vähiten ääniä saanut hahmo putoaa

viikon päätteeksi pois kisasta. Televisioformaattina Putous on suljettu eikä kuka tahansa voi astella kameroiden eteen esittelemään omia sketsihahmoideoitaan. Tässä mielessä kyse ei ole Suomen hauskimmasta sketsihahmosta vaan ohjelman näyttelijäkaartin hersyvimmistä oivalluksesta.

Alkujaan Putouksen piti olla parodia aikakaudelle tyypillisistä kilpailuohjelmista, mutta katsojat ottivat sketsihahmokilpailun siinä määrin tosissaan, että sarjasta on tullut ikoninen tapaus suomalaisessa nykyhumorissa. Putouksessa huumorin kilpailullisuus on läsnä suoran demokratian muodossa: katsojien äänet ratkaisevat, kuka kullakin viikolla putoaa kisasta pois. Viimeisimmällä tuotantokaudella voiton vei lopulta Joonas Nordmanin esittämä liitto-orava Salme Pasi. Voiton myötä hahmon kotikaupungissa Porissa järjestettiin jopa pienimuotoinen kansanjuhla Salme Pasiin kunniaksi.

Putous osoittaa, että vaikka kyse olisikin huumorikilpailusta, ovat kisan seuraukset varsin konkreettisia. Ohjelma houkutteli tälläkin kertaa miljoonayleisön ruutujen äärien viikosta toiseen. Tästä käy ilmi ainakin rahan ja huumoriproduktioiden välinen suhde. Mikäli katsojia ei olisi tarpeeksi, suuren budjetin ohjelmaa tuskin jatkettaisiin kovinkaan kauan. Hauskuus näyttäisi myyvän.

Myös maailman mittakaavassa suomalainen huumori pääsi vahvasti esille, kun Los Angelesissa sijaitseva komediaklubi Laugh Factory (2014) järjesti kilpailun maailman hauskimman ihmisen löytämiseksi. Lokakuun päätteeksi Ismo Leikola kruunattiin voittajaksi valtaisalla äänivyöryllä. Finaalissa Leikola keräsi yli 150 000 ääntä, kun toiseksi tullut pakistanilainen Saad Haroon jäi lähes 100 000 äänen päähän. Lisäksi kilpailun välierävaiheessa Leikola sai suurimmat pisteet myös tuomaristolta. Suomalaisen ylivermaisesta kisaesityksestä erityisesti seuraava humoristinen huomio lähti kiertämään maailman tiedotusvälineitä:

Valtiot eivät ole velkaa toisilleen, valtiot ovat velkaa pankeille. Jos valtiot ovat velkaa pankeille, kuinka typerää ne valtiot ovatkaan, koska maksavat takaisin pankeille. Valtiolla on armeija. Pankilla on neljä kassatyöntekijää ja siivooja.

Loppusyksystä myös Suomessa kisailtiin stand up -komiikassa, kun Iikka Kivi voitti Naurun tasapaino -ohjelman toisen tuotantokauden. Kivi selvisi kisassa jatkoon viikosta toiseen tuomareiden kriittisen katseen alla ja onnistui myös kahmimaan suurimman äänisaaliin finaalilähetyksessä, jossa yleisö pääsi ensimmäistä kertaa kauden aikana äänestämään suosikkejaan. Kivi vakuutti katsojat huumorillaan, jossa käsiteltiin paikoin roisin alapäähuumorin värittämänä muun muassa miehuutta ja isyyttä samoin kuin seksiä ja huumausaineita.

Humanistinen huumorikäsitys

Huumorikilpailut ovat kiehtova ilmiö suhteessa humanistiseen huumorikäsitukseen. Tietenkään produktiot eivät kata kaikkea huumoria maailmassa, mutta ne näyttävät esimerkiksi median myötä merkittävässä roolissa. Vertailua

varten teen lyhyen luonnehdinnan humanistisen huumorikäsitteen avainpiirteistä.

Kuten alussa mainitsin, käsitän huumorin inkongruenssi- eli yhteensopimattomuusteorian ja sen nykyaikaisten sovellusten muodossa (ks. Zareff 2012). Yhteensopimattomuusteorian mukaan huumorin ytimessä on ristiriita, ja tarkemmin ottaen kulttuuristen kategorisointien risteävyys. Tyypillisiä esimerkkejä ovat ”mies pukeutuu naiseksi”, ”ihminen eläimeksi”, ”aikuinen lapseksi” ja niin edelleen. Näissä tapauksissa havainto ei mene täysin yksin kulttuuristen käsitysten kanssa, vaan jotain on mennyt niin sanoakseni vinoon. Huumorissa pelataan siis kielellä ja käsitteillä. Tätä myöten huumori on olemukseltaan väistämättä sosiaalisesti latautunut ilmiö.

Jos ihminen on kasvanut ympäristössä, jossa miehet meikkaavat ja pukeutuvat hameisiin aivan yhtä lailla kuin naisetkin, ei ”miehen pukeutuminen naiseksi” ole enää tuossa muodossa mitenkään poikkeavaa. Tällöin tässä risteämässä ei sinänsä ole mitään erityistä hauskaa. Lisäksi on huomattava, että maailmassa esiintyy monenlaisia arvojen välisiä törmäyksiä: yksi kategorisointien välinen ristiriita saattaa olla toiselle traaginen, toiselle koominen. Tämän tekstin puitteissa ei kuitenkaan voida pureutua tarkemmin näiden ristiriitojen ja tunnereaktioiden väliseen suhteeseen (lisää huumorista ja arvoista esim. Morreall 2009).

Kuten edellä kävi ilmi, huumorintajua voidaan pitää osana yksilön maailmankatsomusta ja se kuvastaa, kuinka ihminen suhtautuu maailmassa esiintyviin ristiriitaisuuksiin. Huumorintajussa ei kuitenkaan ole kyse pelkästään huvituksen tunteesta vaan laajemmasta elämänkokemuksen muovaamasta taipumuksesta. Vaikka piirre on yhtäältä varsin yksilöllinen, huumorintaju on tärkeässä roolissa sosiaalisessa kanssakäymisessä. Huumorintajunsa mukaisesti ihminen esimerkiksi paikantaa, missä tilanteessa on sopivaa esittää vitsejä ja herättää naurua. Tätä myöten huumorintaju linkittyy vahvasti yleisempään arvostelukykyyn ja lopulta myös moraalikäsitteisiin.

Muun muassa Aristoteles (1989, 80) ja André Comte-Sponville (2001, 271–272) nostavat huumorintajun yhdeksi sosiaalisista hyveistä. Tällöin yleislinjauksena on, että nauru edistää ihmisten välistä kanssakäymistä, ja vitsailu sopivissa tilanteissa on hyveellistä. Kaikesta ei kuitenkaan pidä repiä huumoria, joskaan umpimielinen tosikkouskaan ei ole hyvästä. Joka tapauksessa mainittujen filosofien mukaan oikeassa paikassa oikein ajoitettu huumori kuuluu hyvään elämään.

Samaa mieltä huumorin ja hyvän elämän yhteydestä on myös Lydia B. Amir. Hän nostaa tässä suhteessa ajattelijoista esiin Shaftesburyn jaarlin, Johann Georg Hamannin ja Søren Kierkegaardin. Amir painottaa, kuinka Shaftesburyn jaarlille ja Hamannille huumori on suorassa yhteydessä hyvyyteen ja järkeen. Kierkegaardille taas huumori on asenne, joka on ratkaisevassa asemassa pyritäessä kohti elämän korkeinta päämäärää. (Amir 2014, 4–7.)

Oma näkemyksensä naurun ihmisyyttä edistävästä voimasta on myös Friedrich Nietzsche, jonka mukaan *kultainen nauru* – joka myöskin kumpuaa huvittavista havainnoista – on elämänmyönteisyyttä ja iloa. Se on vakavuuden

ylittämistä, maailman näkemistä uudessa valossa matkalla kohti uudenlaista elämänmuotoa. (Esim. Nietzsche 2007, 193.)

Edellisten filosofien katsantoja peilaten huumorin kilpailuttaminen vaikuttaa oudolta. Tietysti esimerkiksi aristoteelisessa perinteessä on osin arvottava sävy, kun pyritään paikantamaan, millainen vitsailu soveltuu hyveelliseen elämään. Tässä tapauksessa arvottaminen tapahtuu ainakin osin eri tavalla kuin nykyisissä huumorin kilpailutilanteissa. Aristoteleen tapauksessa tarkoituksena ei ole olla hausکمmpi kuin muut, vaan kyse on siitä, että elämän muut arvot kietoutuvat yhteen hauskuuden kanssa. Huumori havaitaan ja koetaan linjassa hyvää elämää rakentavien katsomusten kanssa.

Huumorissakin kyse on siis loppujen lopuksi arvoista. Tämä taas yhdistyy ihmisen maailmankuvaan ja siihen, mitkä seikat hän asettaa elämässään etusijalle ja mitkä asiat ovat aidosti tärkeitä. Ihminen nauraa maailmankuvansa mukaisesti. Hän näkee koomisia poikkeamia siellä, missä kulttuuriset kategorisoinnit risteävät. Tämä on inkongruenssiteorian ydin: mikään ei ole naurettava itsessään vaan asiat ovat huvittavia ainoastaan, kun niitä verrataan johonkin. Jos yksilö arvostaa vaikkapa humanistisia arvoja, saattaa ahneuden sävyttäjä voitontavoittelu näyttäytyä naurettavana suhteessa omiin arvostuksiin. Tietenkään kaavio ei ole näin yksinkertainen, koska huvitus on monimutkainen tunnekompleksi, johon vaikuttavat myös monet tiedolliset ominaisuudet (ks. Hurley & al 2011, 89–92). Tästä huolimatta esittämäni yksinkertaistus on suuntaa-antava. Humanistisen maailmankatsomuksen mukaisesti esitän, että nauru ei ole muusta elämästä irrallinen elementti vaan myös naurun äärellä kokonaisvaltainen ihmisyyks on avainasemassa.

Humanistinen huumorikäsitelmä haastaakin muun muassa stand up -koomikoiden (esim. Wickström 2005) näkemyksen, että humoristille nauru on kaikki kaikessa. Pelkän huvituksen ja naurun lisäksi huumorin tulisi synnyttää myös pohdiskelua, joka haastaa käsityksiä maailmasta ja kulttuurista. Simon Critchley kutsuu tällaista naurua korkeimmaksi nauruksi (*risus purus*) (Critchley 2004, 111), ja tällainen pohdiskeleva piirre on erityisen vahva perinteisessä juutalaisessa huumorissa (esim. Ziv & Zajdman 1993, Spalding 2001).

Nauru onkin, kuten jo Henri Bergson esittää, aina tietyn ryhmän naurua ja sitä myöten se on aina myös jaettua (Bergson 1994, 10–11). Robert R. Provine (2000, 44–45) on tulkinnut Bergsonin huomion pohjalta, että me nauramme herkimmin silloin, kun muita ihmisiä on läsnä. Havainto pitää kieltämättä paikansa, mutta huumori ja nauru voidaan käsittää myös syvemmissä mielessä yhteiskunnallisena ilmiönä. Numeraalinen sosiaalisuus – siis että läsnä on useampi kuin yksi ihminen – ei tällöin selitä naurun luonnetta. Aiheen ymmärtämisen kannalta tärkeämpää olisikin tarkastella huumorinkäytön tapoja, vitsien aihepiirejä, naurun potentiaalisesti yhdistävää ja toisaalta hajottavaa luonnetta. Huumori on esimerkiksi käsitetty yhtäältä konservatiiviseksi (esim. Hirn 1949, Alho 1988, Knuuttila 1992, Bergson 1994) ja toisaalta kriittiseksi voimaksi (esim. Bahtin 2002, Nevanlinna 1988, Kolakowski 1969, Winston 1972, Zareff 2012).

Kun huumori ja nauru ymmärretään sosiaalisen suhteen muodoksi, voivat ne olla ilmaus yhtäältä rakentavasta momentista tai toisaalta tuhoavasta ele-

mentistä. Giseline Kuipersin Hollannissa ja Yhdysvalloissa suorittamat empiiriset tutkimukset ihmisten suhteista vitseihin tukevat näkökantaa. Esimerkiksi vanhojen luokkaerojen pitäisi olla historiaa Alankomaissa, mutta Kuipersin empiirinen aineisto osoittaa muuta: korkeasti koulutetut hollantilaiset suhtautuvat vitseihin jo lähtökohtaisesti kielteisesti. Ne nähdään mauttomina ja vulgaareina, liian helppona huumorin muotona. Toisissa sosiaalisissa ryhmissä vitseihin suhtaudutaan huomattavasti suopeammin. (Kuipers 2006, 15–16, 47–48.) Vaikka Kuipers keskittyy tutkimuksessaan nimenomaisesti vitseihin ja pitkälti hollantilaiseen ympäristöön, hänen tuloksensa ovat ainakin osin sovitettavissa myös laajemmin huumorintutkimuksellisiin tulkintoihin. Vähintään tutkimuksesta välittyä, että suhtautuminen huumoriin on sidoksissa ihmisen sosiaaliseen ympäristöön. Käsitys hauskuudesta on tässä mielessä jaettua ja usein se on yhteneväinen saman sosiaalisen luokan edustajilla. Asialla on myös kääntöpuolensa. Kuipers muotoilee, kuinka huumori yhtäältä yhdistää ihmisiä mutta toisaalta myös erottaa. Hänen mukaansa eri sosiaalisten luokkien eriävät tavat suhtautua huumoriin osoittavat, että huumori alleviivaa eroja myös ihmisten välillä. (Kuipers 2006, 1, 14.)

Myös huumorintajun käsite saa Kuipersin tutkimusten yhteydessä merkittävän täsmennyksen, kun kyse ei ole pelkästään suhtautumisesta sisällölliseen hauskuuteen vaan myös hauskuuttamisen muotoon. Yhteisöllisen huumorintajun puitteissa tietyn ryhmän edustajat pitävät vitsejä jo kategorialtaan matalamielisenä huvituksena. Tällöin paitsi vitsinkerronta myös vitsien kuuleminen on jotain, mitä ei pidetä erityisen mielekkäänä huvittelutapana. Toki jo Aristoteles (1989, 80) ja Sigmund Freud (1983, 89) ovat vihjanneet tähän suuntaan esittäessään huomioita orjan ja vapaan miehen sekä rahvaan ja sivistyneen luokan eroavaisuuksista huvitusten äärellä. Kuipersin tutkimus tuokin empiiristä uskottavuutta filosofien yksittäisten huomioiden taustalle.

Kilpailu ihmisen kuvana

Osana kulttuurista huumorikuvastoa vuoden 2014 huumorikilpailut osoittavat ainakin, että ne ovat suhteellisen normaali ja hyväksytty viihteen muoto. Humanistisen huumorikäsitteen näkökulmasta kilpailun läpäisemä huumori tekee naurusta raadollista sikäli, että se asettaa erilaiset hauskuudet paremmuusjärjestykseen. Samalla kun voittajaa juhlistaan, ilmaistaan implisiittisesti, että toinen hauskuutus ei ollut yhtä hyvä vaan huonompi. Ilmitasollaan kilpailu esittää, että Leikola on hauskempi kuin haastajansa, Suomen hauskin vitsi on huvittavampi kuin muut jutut.

Kilpailuista voi löytää vihjeen myös sen suuntaan, että huumorintajut voisi olla mahdollista asemoida paremmuusjärjestykseen. Tällöin viesti on, että mikäli minun mielestäni joku muu stand up -koomikko kuin Iikka Kivi oli Naurun tasapainon hauskin, minun huumorintajuni on eräässä mielessä väärässä: minä en tunnista kaikkein hauskinta esiintyjää.

Huumorin kilpailuttamisessa on lähtökohtainen ongelma, jos oletetaan, että voittaja on kaikkein paras hauskuuden suhteen. Kun ajatusta peilataan suh-

teessa huumorin perusteoriaan – että huumorissa kyse on ristiriidasta – näyttää yhtälö oudolta. Voiko P ja ei-P olla hausempi kuin Q ja ei-Q? Tämä jännite ei tuota kuitenkaan kovin suurta ongelmaa mainittujen kilpailujen suhteen, jos tarkastellaan voittajien väitettyä ominaisuutta hieman toisin. Kilpailuissa ei luultavasti etsitä objektiivisessa mielessä kaikkein hauskinta yksilöä, vaan kyse on pikemminkin suosion mittaamisesta.

Olisi melko yksioikoista väittää, että yksittäinen ohjelma pystyy paikantamaan aikakauden hauskimman ilmiön. Ilman kattavaa empiiristä tutkimusta on myös vaikea esittää väitteitä sen suhteen, kuinka iso osa katsojista ottaa kilpailut tosissaan. Enemmänkin huumorikilpailut välittyvät internetissä ja televisioruuduissa suhteellisen viattomina. Pelkkien äänestystulosten pohjalta ei voi päätellä, kuinka iso osa kansasta suhtautuu tällaisiin kilpailuihin vakavasti. Vaikuttaa pikemminkin siltä, että kilpailut eivät esitä kovinkaan paljoa huumorin paremmuudesta sinänsä vaan ne toimivat toisenlaisina kuvina ajasta. Kilpailuissa on pohjimmiltaan kyse voitontavoittelusta, mikä ei edes huumorikamppailun äärellä välttämättä tarkoita sitä, että kilpailusta saatu tulos koskisi yksinomaan hauskuuden laatua.

Kiistatonta kuitenkin on, että kilpailut mittaavat jonkinlaista paremmuutta. Mitä paremmuuden mittareita ikinä käytetäänkään, on kilpailutilanteessa vaatimus selvä: esiintyjän tulisi olla parempi kuin haastajansa. Huumorin ammattilaisista esimerkiksi Tommi Tuominen myöntää avoimesti, ettei kilpailu suinkaan ole viatonta huumorinkaan puitteissa. Huumorialan kilpailussa voittoa tavoitteleva koomikko toivoo – vaikka ei itse sitä sanoiksi pukisikaan – että toiset esiintyvät huonommin kuin hän. Tuominen tiivistää sanontaa mukaillen: ”Näytä minulle se koomikko, joka ei koskaan vertaa itseään muihin, ja minä näytän sinulle valehtelijan.” (Tuominen 2014.) Vaikka yksittäinen humoristi ei voikaan sanoa olevansa varsinaisesti hausempi kuin virkaveljensä tai -siskonsa, voi hän kilpailutuloksen myötä sanoa olevansa suositumpi. Eikä pidä väheksyä esimerkiksi Naurun tasapaino -ohjelmassa voittajalle suotavaa 20 000 euron palkintopottia. Paremmuus on palkitsevaa ainakin rahallisesti.

Suhteessa humanistiseen huumorikäsitteeseen edellä esitetystä välittyy lukuisia momenteja, joita tulisi tarkastella kriittisesti. Ensinnäkin huumorikilpailujen näennäinen viattomuus voidaan kyseenalaistaa. Humanistisen ajattelun valossa on erittäin huolestuttavaa, jos yleisö ottaa kaikkialle levittäytyvän kilpailuasenteen vastaan normaalina, kukaties jopa luonnollisena seikkana. Kyltymätön voittamisenhalu ja toive muiden päihittämisestä kielivät ennen kaikkea yhteisöllisestä asenteesta. Kyse ei olekaan siitä, että pelkästään huumori olisi kilpailun lävistämää, vaan että länsimaiselle ihmiselle kilpailutilanne on tavanmukainen ja normaali ilmiö. Tämän normaaliuden kyseenalaistaminen on humanistisen filosofian ytimessä. Esimerkiksi elämäntapaohjelmia analysoinut Angela McRobbie (2004) painottaa, kuinka huumori voi toimia symbolisen väkivallan mekanismina, mitä on kuitenkin vaikea havaita viihteen kaavun alta. Tämänkaltaiset tutkimukselliset avaukset ovat ratkaisevan tärkeitä ilmiön ymmärtämisen kannalta.

Kilpailu näyttäisi olevan ajankuva myös muiden kuin huumoriproduktioiden suhteen. Viihteen puitteissa kilpaillaan jatkuvasti esimerkiksi kokkiohjelmissa, selviytyjätaisteluissa, musiikin parissa ja muissa vastaavissa. Tietenkin kilpailua on valtavasti myös viihdekentän ulkopuolella, kuten talouden ja urheilun saralla. Tässä valossa voimien ja taitojen mitteleminen alkaa vaikuttaa luonnolliselta osalta ihmisyyttä. Ei ihme, että osa huumorinteoreetikoista esittää, että kilpailu on kiinteä osa myös huumoria. Esimerkiksi Charles R. Gruner on argumentoinut, että huumori on aina peliä ja että jokaisen vitsin suhteen on paikannettavissa voittaja ja häviö; Grunerille nauru tarkoittaa voittamista, mikä puolestaan on laajasti ottaen sama kuin että saavuttaa sen mitä tavoittelee (Gruner 2000, 8–9).

Yleisesti ottaen ylemmyysteorian mukaan me nauramme muiden epäonnistumisille, typeryydelle, kömpelyydelle ynnä muille vastaaville puutteille. Gruneria aikaisemmin Thomas Hobbes esitti jo 1600-luvulla, että me nauramme, kun koemme olevamme muiden yläpuolella (Hobbes 1999, 70). John Morreall on tulkinnut Hobbesin nauruhuomiota suhteessa tämän laajempaan yhteiskunnalliseen katsantoon, ja esittää, että Hobbesille elämä on kamppailua vallasta, jolloin oma voitto ja toisen kukistuminen antavat aihetta riemuun. Nauru on merkki siitä, että toinen on päihitetty jollain mittarilla. Kun elämää määrittää jatkuva kamppailu, ihmiset etsivät ilomielin naurunaiheita toisistaan. (Morreall 1987, 19.)

Myös Grunerin mukaan huumorissa piilevä kilpailumomentti on seurausta elämisen ehdoista. Hänen mukaansa ylemmyydentunne on naurun edellytys yksinomaan sen vuoksi, millaisia eläimiä meistä on historian saatossa kehittänyt. Grunerin katsannossa ihmisyyys on yhdistelmä aggressiota, kilpailuviettä, uteliaisuutta ja nokkeluutta. Elämä on ollut, ja on edelleen, kamppailua ruuasta, suojasta, turvallisuudesta ja suvunjatkamisesta. Sama taistelu heijastuu Grunerin mukaan myös nykyajan naurussa ja huumorissa. (Gruner 2000, 16.)

Teoreettisella tasolla Grunerin näkemys huumorista pelinä on helposti kumottavissa (tarvitsee löytää vain yksi vastaesimerkki), ja tyypillisesti huumorinteoreetikot kritisoivatkin Grunerin ylemmyysteoriaan pohjaavaa huumori-käsitystä (ks. esim. Hurley & al. 2011, 60). Humanistisesta näkökulmasta huolestuttavampaa on kuitenkin Grunerin esittämä ihmiskuva, jonka mukaan ihmisyyys on pohjimmiltaan nokkelan aggressiivista kilpailua toisia vastaan.

Katson, että ihmistä ei voida luonnehtia tiettyjen muuttumattomien ominaisuuksien pohjalta: on virhe esimerkiksi esittää, että ihminen olisi luonnostaan aggressiivinen. Aggressiivisuus ei ole varsinaisesti erillinen piirre vaan ennemminkin osa laajempaa syndroomaa. Antropologisten tutkimusten valossa aggressiivisuutta esiintyy tyypillisesti sellaisissa yhteisöissä, jotka korostavat tiukkaa hierarkiaa, luokkaeroja ja valta-asetelmia. Tällöin johtopäätös on, että aggressiivisuus ei ole varsinaisesti oma erillinen käyttäytymismallinsa, vaan se on sidoksissa vallitseviin yhteiskunnallisiin arvostuksiin. (Vrt. Fromm 1992, 193.)

Oletettavasti yksikään tuotantoyhtiö ei väitä, että kilpailutilanne olisi ainoa oikea tapa tehdä huumoria. Huomio tulisi kuitenkin kiinnittää siihen, että

kilpailuasetelma välittyy huumorinkin puitteissa ikään kuin normaalina. Se, ettei tätä kyseenalaisteta, on problemaattista. Tällöin huumorikilpailut ovat vain yksi osoitus kaikkialle levittäytyneessä paremmuuden paikantamisessa. Vallitseva huumorikuvasto kilpailuineen vahvistaa kuvaa siitä, että ihminen on kilpailun lävistämä olento. Tällaisessa yhteiskunnallisessa tilanteessa pyrkimys olla parempi kuin muut käsitetään helposti luontaiseksi taipumukseksi, kuten myös Hobbes esittää.

On kuitenkin mahdollista kyseenalaistaa väite, että ihminen olisi luonnostaan kilpailullinen tai aggressiivinen. Kilpailu ja voittaminen – jopa huumorin puitteissa – kielivät yhdestä inhimillisen olemisen muodosta, mutta se ei automaattisesti yhdisty humanistisiin arvoihin. Vaikka pintapuolisesti huumorikisa olisi viatonta ja sitä käytäisiin sulassa sovussa ja yhteisymmärryksessä, on tämän pinnan taakse pyrittävä näkemään.

Koko kysymys huumorin paremmuudesta näyttäytyy osin mielettömänä suhteessa huumorin teorioihin. Inkongruenssiteorian puitteissa painotetaan, että hauskuutta syntyy, kun kulttuuriset kategoriat risteävät. Mutta tästä määritelmästä ei vielä avaudu, miksi jokin yksittäinen risteämä on hausکمmpi kuin jokin toinen. Miten siis arvottaa huvituksen tunnetta? Arthur Schopenhauerin (1887, 279–281) mielestä tilanne on sitä hausکمmpi, mitä jyrکمmpi ristiriita havainnon ja ajatuksen välillä on, mutta tämä ei ole täysin pätevä mittari. Jos kohtaamme jotain niin käsittämätöntä, ettei sillä ole minkäänlaista yhteyttä käsitteistöömme, ei tämä luultavasti synnytä suurinta mahdollista huvituksen tunnetta. Yleisesti ottaen huumorin teorit osoittavat, millaisia elementtejä on läsnä koomisessa, mutta komparatiivien tarkkaan asemointiin ne soveltuvat huonosti.

Humanistis-filosofisen käsitetulkinnan valossa humorististen esitysten asettaminen arvojärjestykseen kilpailullisin perustein on arveluttavaa. Huumori ja huumorintaju ovat ennemminkin ilmauksia maailmankatsomuksesta, elämäntilanteesta, yksilön historiasta ja suhtautumisesta maailmassa esiintyviin ristiriitoihin. Uhkana on, että näiden riemunhetkien kilpailuttaminen vieraannuttaa meidät huumorin välittömästä lohdun, huojennuksen ja elämänilon momentista. Ilmiselvästi on lukuisia kulttuurisia tapoja arvioida ja arvostella huumoria, mutta ylipäätään tarve tällaiselle on ilmaus siitä, että me itse olemme kilpailun läpäisemiä. Tällöin kilpailutettu huumori on vain heijastuma kilpailun läpäisemästä ihmisestä.

Huumorikilpailujen tutkiminen jatkossa

Yleisesti voidaan luennehtia, että huumori ilmentää aina aikaansa ja ympäristöään. Tällöin sen sijaan, että korostettaisiin voittajan nimeä, tulisi tarkastelussa painottaa, millaiset risteymät ovat vallitsevassa kulttuurissa yleisiä. Niistä nähdään millaiset ristiriidat ovat valtaosan tunnistettavissa ja millaisille paradokseille laajat joukot kykenevät nauramaan. Täten kilpailut eivät välttämättä esitä mitään huumorin paremmuudesta sinänsä, vaan toimivat ajan kuvina.

Jos huumori ja huumorintaju käsitetään ennen kaikkea sosiaalisina ilmiöinä, kuten olen esittänyt, myös huumorialan kilpailut ovat piirteitä kollektiivisista olemisen tavoista. Tämän vuoksi huumorin tarkempi empiirinen tutkiminen olisi äärimmäisen tärkeää. Kuten edellä totesin, Kuipersin tutkimukset ovat tärkeitä avauksia tällä saralla, mutta niihin liittyy tiettyjä puutteita. Hän itsekin mainitsee, että kyselylomake ei välttämättä ole paras mahdollinen tapa tutkia vitsejä (Kuipers 2006, 152).

Empiirisen tutkimusasetelman mahdollisesta haastavuudesta huolimatta huumorikilpailut tarjoavat materiaalia yhteisöllisestä huumorintajusta. Niistä välittyä, mitkä aiheet ja huumorinmuodot ovat suosittuja. Ilman pääsyä tarkempaan dataan, moni tärkeä kysymys jää kuitenkin vaille vastausta: Miten naiset ja miehet äänestivät kilpailuissa? Oliko sukupuolten välillä eroa? Pystyttäisiinkö Suomessa Kuipersin tutkielman tapaan paikantamaan eroja luokkien välille huumorin pohjalta? Miten eri ikäryhmät suhtautuvat huumorikilpailuihin? Onko huumorielementtejä, jotka yhdistävät lähes jokaista? Potentiaalisesti kilpailuista saatava lähdeaineisto antaa erinomaisen pohjan tutkia tarkemmin yhteiskuntaa. Jatkossa kattavampi yhteistyö eri huumoriproduktioiden kanssa voisi avata tutkijoillekin erinomaisia mahdollisuuksia tämän analysoimiseen. Pidemmän aikavälin tutkimuksissa voitaisiin myös yrittää paikantaa, kuinka media vaikuttaa yhteisöllisiin huumorikäsitteisiin. Voisiko se tehdä jostain huumorinmuodosta ja tekemisen tavasta normatiivista?

Huumorikilpailut poikivat joka tapauksessa mittavia aineistoja. Esimerkiksi vuonna 2001 Richard Wisemanin johtama projekti paikallisti maailman hauskimman vitsin. Tätä yksittäistä tulosta kiehtovampaa ja rohkaisevampaa on kuitenkin, että projektissa kartutettiin 40 000 vitsin aineisto ja siinä saatiin reilut 1,5 miljoonaa ääntä ympäri maailmaa. (LaughLab 2001.) Näin valtava datamäärä kannustaa tutkimaan huumoria empiirisesti myös jatkossa. Tulokulmiakin voidaan hioa: sen sijaan, että yritetään löytää maailman hauskin vitsi, voidaan pyrkiä tarkastelemaan syitä vitsin suosion takana. Mitkä elementit hauskuutuksessa yhdistävät ihmisiä? Mitä vitsi kertoo nykyajasta? Miksi jotkut humoristiset esitykset onnistuvat rikkomaan kulttuurirajoja? Maailman hauskin vitsi on erinomainen löydös, mutta myös syvällisempiä tuloksia on syytä yrittää paikantaa.

Huumoriesityksissä voidaan nähdä kilpailullinen elementti myös muissa yhteyksissä kuin tässä artikkelissa on mainittu. Esimerkiksi ammattikriitikot arvostelevat omien lähtökohtiensa mukaisesti komediaelokuvia. Kun käytössä on tähtiluokitusjärjestelmä, näyttäytyy yksi komediaelokuva parempana kuin toinen. Näiden arvioiden mukaisesti huumoriesitykset voidaan asemoida paremmuusjärjestykseen elokuvagenren puitteissa. Ainakin Martta Heikkilä on tulkinnut, että kritiikin antaminen on osaltaan vallankäyttöä (Heikkilä 2012, 31–32). Veijo Hietala muistuttaa, että genrepohjaisessa kritiikissä kriitikko analysoi komediaa ensisijaisesti sen hauskuuden kannalta, koska tällaisen elokuvan tehtävä on naurattaa (Hietala 2012, 171–172). Jatkossa olisikin kiintoisaa selvittää ammattikriitikoiden ja yleisön välistä mahdollista yhteistä tai eriävää näkemystä huumorielokuvista. Yksi ajanmukainen esimerkki tästä on vuoden 2015 alus-

sa julkaistu *Luokkakokous*-elokuva, joka toi esiin tutun jännitteen kahden ryhmittymän välillä. Siinä missä ammattimaiset arvostelijat antoivat elokuvalla lähinnä yhtä, joskus kahta tähteä, yleisöä virtasi elokuvateattereihin ennätysmäärin (ks. esim. Alanne 2015). Ilman laajempaa empiiristä otantaa ei voida kuitenkaan väittää, että yleisömäärä osoittaisi elokuvan erityisen hauskuuden, mutta joka tapauksessa esillä näyttäisi olevan kiinnostavia kollektiivisia näkemyseroja.

VIITTEET

1. Huumorikilpailut eivät suinkaan ole ilmaantuneet komediakartastoon tyhjästä. Koska tämä artikkeli ei lukeudu historiantutkimuksen alaan, keskityn tarkastelussa nykyisiin huumorikilpailuihin. Todettakoon yleisesti, että historian saatossa niin komediakirjoittajat, hovinarrit, pellet ja muut humoristiset esiintyjät ovat kilvoitelleet siitä, kuka saa parhaat naurut. (ks. esim. Alho 1988.)

LÄHTEET JA KIRJALLISUUS

- Alanne, Joonas 2015. Kommentti: Luokkakokous menestyy, kriitikoita ärsyttää. URL <http://www.episodi.fi/artikkelit/luokkakokous-menestyy-ja-kriitikoita-arsyttaa/> (luettu huhtikuussa 2015).
- Alho, Olli 1988. *Hulluuden puolustus ja muita kirjoituksia naurun historiasta*. Helsinki: WSOY.
- Amir, Lydia B. 2014. *Humor and the Good Life in Modern Philosophy. Shaftesbury, Hamann, Kierkegaard*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Aristoteles 1989. *Nikomakhoksen etiikka*. Suom. Simo Knuuttila, *Teokset VII*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus.
- Bahtin, Mihail 2002/1965. *François Rabelais – Keskiajan ja renessanssin nauru*. Suom. Tapani Laine ja Paula Nieminen. Helsinki: LIKE.
- Bergson, Henri 1994/1900. *Nauru. Tutkimus komiikan merkityksestä*. Suom. Sanna Isto ja Marko Pasanen. Helsinki: LoKi-Kirjat.
- Billig, Michael 2005. *Laughter and Ridicule. Towards a Social Critique of Humour*. Lontoo: SAGE Publications.
- Buchanan, Allen, Brocks, Dan W., Daniels, Norman & Wikler, Daniel 2001/2000. *From Chance to Choice: Genetics and Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Comte-Sponville, André 2001/1995. *Pieni kirja suurista hyöeistä*. Suom. Virpi Hämeen-Anttila. Helsinki: Basam Books Oy.
- Critchley, Simon 2004/2001. *On Humour*. New York: Routledge.
- Freud, Sigmund 1983/1905. *Vitsi ja sen yhteys piilotajuntaan*. Suom. Mirja Rutanen. Helsinki: Love Kirjat.
- Fromm, Erich 1992/1973. *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*. New York: Picador / Henry Holt and Company.
- Gruner, Charles R. 2000/1997. *The Game of Humor. A Comprehensive Theory of Why We Laugh*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Heikkilä, Martta 2012. Johdanto: Taiteesta puheeseen. Teoksessa Martta Heikkilä (toim.), *Taidekriitikin perusteet*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 11–54.
- Hietala, Veijo 2012. Elokuvakriitikin muuttuvat muodot. Teoksessa Martta Heikkilä (toim.), *Taidekriitikin perusteet*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 142–177.
- Hietalahti, Jarno (tulossa). *Laughing at Oneself: On the New Social Character. Studies in Social & Political Thought: Pathologies of Recognition*.
- Hietalahti, Jarno 2014. Naurun päässä hämmöttää kauhu. *Paatos* 2/2014. URL <http://jarjestot.uta.fi/aatos/paatos/2014-02/naurukauhu.html> (luettu maaliskuussa 2015).
- Hietalahti, Jarno 2010. *Epämukavaa – sepä mukavaa. Yhteiskuntafilosofinen tutkielma komiikan, naurun ja väkivallan suhteesta*. Pro gradu -tutkielma. Jyväskylän yliopiston yhteiskuntatieteiden ja filosofian laitos.
- Hirn, Yrjö 1949/1914. *Esteettinen elämä*. Helsinki: Otava.
- Hobbes, Thomas 1999/1651. *Leviathan, eli kirkollisen ja valtiollisen yhteiskunnan aines, muoto ja valta*. Suom. Tuomo Aho. Tampere: Vastapaino.

- Hurley, Matthew M., Dennett, Daniel C. & Adams, Reginald B. Jr. 2011. *Inside Jokes. Using Humor to Reverse-Engineer the Mind*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press.
- Kinnunen, Aarne 1994. Huumorin ja koomisen keskeneräinen kysymys. Helsinki: WSOY.
- Knuuttila, Seppo 1992. *Kansanhuumorin mieli. Kaskut maailmankuvan aineksina*. Helsinki: SKS.
- Kolakowski, Leszek 1969. *Marxism and Beyond. On Historical Understanding and Individual Responsibility*. Kääntänyt Jane Zielenko Peel. Lontoo: Pall Mall P.
- Kuipers, Giseline 2008. The sociology of humor. Teoksessa Victor Raskin (toim.), *Primer of Humor Research*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 361-398.
- Kuipers, Giseline 2006. *Good Humor, Bad Taste: A Sociology of the Joke*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Laugh Factory 2014. Funniest Person in the World. URL <http://www.laughfactory.com/> (luettu marraskuussa 2014).
- LaughLab 2001. URL <http://www.laughlab.co.uk/home.html> (luettu tammi-kuussa 2015).
- McRobbie, Angela 2004. Notes on 'What Not To Wear' and post-feminist symbolic violence. Teoksessa Lisa Adkins & Beverley Skeggs (toim.), *Feminism After Bourdieu*. Norwich: Blackwell Publishing, 99-109.
- Morreall, John 2009. *Comic Relief. A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Morreall, John 1987. *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Nevanlinna, Tuomas 1988. Aforismeja teemasta nauru ja valta. *Kantti* 1/1988.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich 2007/1886. *Hyvän ja pahan tuolla puolen*. Suom. J. A. Hollo. Helsinki: Otava.
- Provine, Robert R. 2000. *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation*. New York: Viking.
- Raskin, Victor 2008. Theory of humor and practice of humor research: Editor's notes and thoughts. Teoksessa Victor Raskin (toim.), *Primer of Humor Research*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1-15.
- Ruch, Willibald 1998. Foreword and overview. Sense of humor: A new look at an old concept. Teoksessa Willibald Ruch (toim.), *The Sense of Humor. Explorations of a Personality Characteristic*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Schopenhauer, Arthur 1887. *The World as Will and Idea. Volume II*. Kääntäneet R. B. Haldane & J. Kemp. Boston, Ticknor and Company. URL <http://www.archive.org/details/theworldaswill02schouoft> (luettu tammi-kuussa 2015).
- Spalding, Henry D. (toim.) 2001. *Encyclopedia of Jewish Humor. From Biblical Times to the Modern Age*. New York: Jonathan David Publishers.
- Tuominen, Tommi 2014. Stand upissa toisia vastaan kilpailemista ei pysty edes välttämään. URL <http://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2014/09/09/stand-upissa-toisia-vastaan-kilpailemista-ei-pysty-edes-valttamaan> (luettu marraskuussa 2014).

- Wickström, André 2005. *Das Humoristische Manifest. Kirja stand up -komiikasta.* Suom. Viia Järvinen. Helsinki: WSOY.
- Winston, Matthew 1972. Humoir noir and Black Humor. Teoksessa Levin Harry (toim.) *Veins of Humor*. Cambridge: Harvard English Studies 3, 269–284.
- Yle 2014. Suomen hauskin vitsi. URL <http://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2014/04/08/suomen-hauskin-vitsi-2014> (luettu marraskuussa 2014).
- Zareff, Janne 2012. *Journalistinen komiikka. Teoreettisia ja käytännöllisiä avauksia.* Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto.
- Ziv, Avner & Zajdman, Anat (toim.) 1993. *Semites and Stereotypes. Characteristics of Jewish Humor.* Westport, Conncticut/Lontoo: Greenwood Press.